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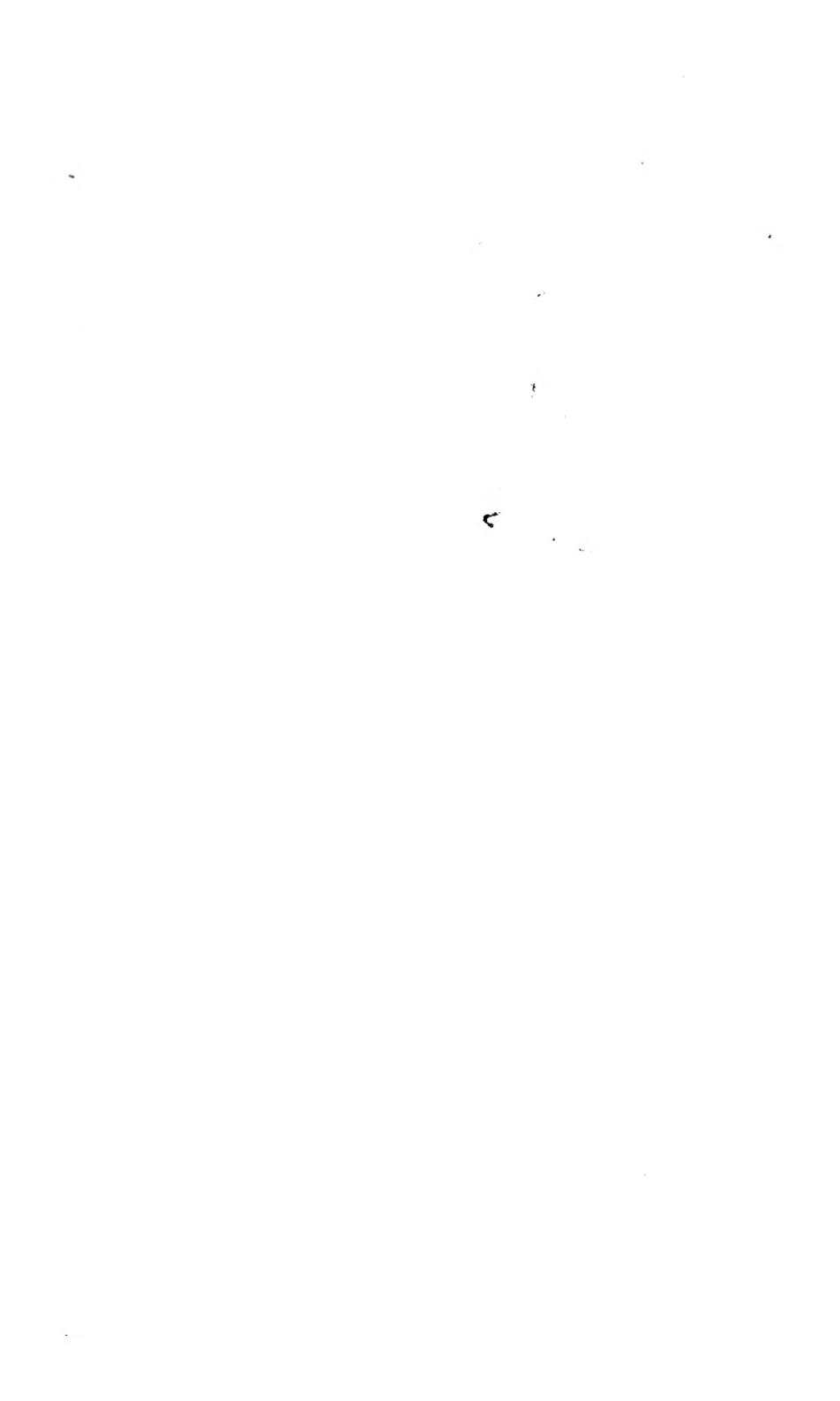












# THE FRIGATE CONSTITUTION

THE CENTRAL FIGURE OF THE  
NAVY UNDER SAIL

BY

IRA N. HOLLIS



BOSTON AND NEW YORK  
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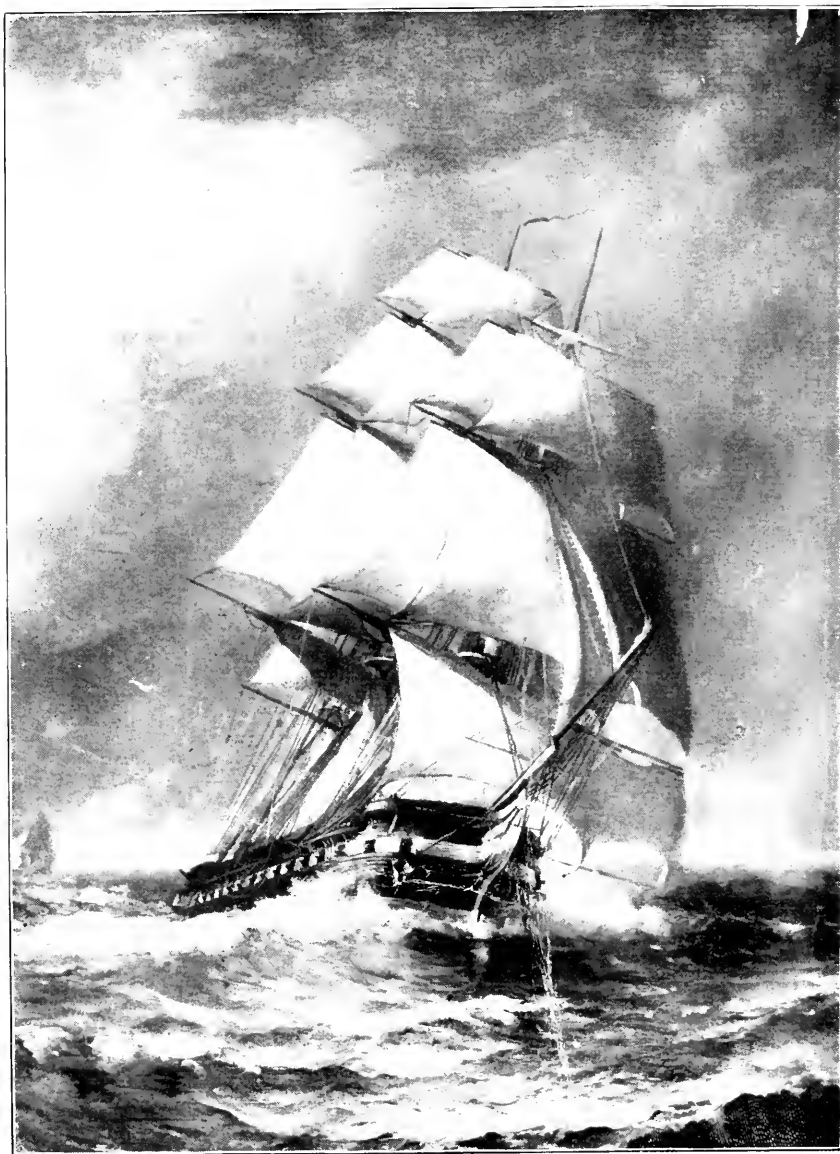
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THE FRIGATE CONSTITUTION

## PREFACE

THE history of the Frigate Constitution is undertaken in order to bring within the pages of one volume all the events which go to make a long and interesting career upon the sea. It is the outgrowth of a short article for the "Atlantic Monthly" to commemorate the hundredth anniversary of the vessel's launch. She has so long been a favorite topic for storytellers and writers that nothing new remains to be told. It is rather a case for recalling much that has been forgotten. As the formation and service of the sailing navy supply the background which brings our ship into stronger perspective, all the circumstances which had an influence upon her design, construction, and employment are given. While, therefore, in no sense a history of the Navy, it forms a reasonably connected narrative of naval events, and particularly of our good old frigate. The principal authorities for the whole career of the Constitution are the American State Papers, the ship's logbooks, the reports of commanding officers, and various naval

biographies. Cooper's "History of the Navy," Goldsborough's "Naval Chronicle," Roosevelt's "History of the War of 1812," and several admirable articles by Mr. J. R. Soley have been consulted and used. It hardly seems necessary to acknowledge indebtedness for tales and minor details which have been common property for half a century. This volume was prepared during the summer of the Spanish War, when the writer watched with pride and solicitude the service of his former comrades who have worthily maintained the traditions of the Old Navy. With the hope of making clearer the relation of the sailor to the country and of stimulating the interest in rebuilding the ship, it is now given to the public.

IRA N. HOLLIS.

CAMBRIDGE, September 19, 1900.



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# THE FRIGATE CONSTITUTION

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION — FRIGATES AS THE CRUISERS OF THE SAILING NAVIES

THE events connected with the life of a nation are often intimately associated with objects and places. These have a permanent value, preserving for us, if we do not neglect them, the outward semblance they presented to the men and women who gave them their places in history. The importance of Bunker Hill, of Independence Hall, and, more recently, of Gettysburg, as sources of inspiration to the youth of this republic can hardly be overestimated. They express the true spirit of liberty and the love of country even better than the noblest writings. Among the objects that must always be dear to the American people is the old ship Constitution, now lying neglected under a temporary roof at the Boston Navy Yard. Her career, outside of its historic value, is eventful and

romantic. No ship has ever seen more life and action.

The first twenty years of her existence were filled with events of the greatest importance to the new nation formed on this side of the Atlantic. She came at a period when we sorely needed a strong arm to vindicate for the second time our right to independence and to the untrammelled development of our own institutions. Her victories did much to teach a few scattered colonies, or states, respect for themselves and faith in their own united strength. Perhaps more than all else she stands to-day for the freedom of the seas. Around her are woven the memories of our great sailors, many of whom obtained their early training upon her decks. Her history is almost a history of the Navy during its most critical period, and she has survived to us the heirloom of a glorious past, which cannot be forgotten so long as her wooden walls stand firm. She holds a place as a representative of the days of sails, and is one of the finest examples of the wooden frigate at its best. As a type in marine warfare her class was the flower of the sailing period; and although sails were soon to be superseded, there was still time for her victories to work great changes in European navies. Her model and armament were copied by England before the War of 1812 had closed, as it



was imperative to build something that could overtake and destroy her. In her day, the organization of men to manœuvre and fight ships had reached a high state of perfection. It is probable that we shall never find crews better adapted by nature to contend with the sea, or better fitted by training to carry their ships into distant seas and fight them, than were the seamen on the decks of the old Constitution. Soon after she was launched, experiments on the steam propulsion of vessels demonstrated the power of the steam-engine, and the first voyage of the Clermont inaugurated changes which have taken place with increasing rapidity, and have relegated the armed sailing-vessel to a past already growing hazy to the young men of the Navy. In another generation there will be few of them who have ever served on a sailing-ship, except for a short time by way of practice. This story is written, therefore, with the hope of keeping alive the interest in our old ships and in the sailors who contributed with their lives to the welfare of their country. It has been written and rewritten in naval histories, too often simply as a chronicle of triumphs calculated to exalt American pride. While her victories were real, their influence upon the march of events was moral, and they gather their greatest value from the lessons they have taught. The events of the early history of the

Navy are so closely interwoven that it becomes difficult to select from many things only those which have a direct bearing upon the career of the Constitution. The line is, therefore, not closely drawn, in order that the conditions under which her work was done may be clearly understood.

The sailing-frigates occupied in the old navies much the same place as the cruisers of modern times. They were what Nelson called "the eyes of the fleet," and often served as scouts to watch the movements of the enemy. Before the invention of the telegraph and the steam-engine, campaigns were relatively much longer. The whereabouts of a ship, or of a fleet, could not always be ascertained during the course of a reasonable cruise; and even when positively known, a hostile meeting might be indefinitely postponed by adverse winds. Two fleets might dodge each other for months. Fast frigates formed the natural look-outs and auxiliaries in fleet service. They were sent out to bring back to an appointed rendezvous all the information that could be secured by scouring the seas and speaking every merchant-vessel brought within hail. To increase effectiveness in this service, the hulls of frigates were made large enough to carry a great spread of canvas, and the lines were drawn relatively fine, so that they could outsail anything afloat. They also carried batteries

capable of destroying all armed craft except line-of-battle-ships. As commerce-destroyers they were very useful.

At the time the Constitution was built, three classes of ships formed the bulk of most navies, — sloops, frigates, and line-of-battle-ships. They usually carried three masts with square sails, and were distinguished by the number of decks having complete batteries, although the nomenclature was not always applied alike by different writers, and the rating was not a reliable indication of a ship's power. The term "sloop" had a technical meaning when applied to armed vessels. In ordinary use, it signified a single-masted fore-and-aft-rigged vessel carrying a jib; but in the Navy the name was also applied to vessels with all their guns on the upper deck. A brig, or a schooner, might belong to this class by virtue of carrying the guns on one deck. At the beginning of the century a sloop-of-war, or corvette, mounted from eighteen to thirty guns on the spar-deck; sometimes with part of the battery on a raised quarter-deck and forecastle. The *Levant*, captured by the Constitution in 1815, was a typical sloop. She had on a single deck eighteen 32-pound carronades, two long 9-pounders, and one shifting 12-pounder. This battery is characteristic, and indicates the usual armament of the sloop in the old navies.

The frigate was always ship-rigged, and carried guns on two decks, the main or gun-deck having a complete battery, and the upper or spar-deck having guns only on the forward and after parts. The waists seldom mounted any guns. At first the power of a frigate was correctly indicated by the number of guns, as a thirty-six, or a forty-four gun ship; but after the invention of the carronade much confusion arose, as many guns were added to ships without change in their classification. The old batteries were usually from twenty-six to thirty long 18-pounders on the gun-deck, and from six to twelve long guns of lighter calibre on the upper deck. The size and shape of the hull precluded a heavy battery on the spar-deck, on account of top-heaviness and consequent danger of capsizing. The introduction of the carronade in the latter part of the eighteenth century supplied the Navy with large-calibre guns weighing very much less than the old guns. They were not so effective at long ranges, but they quickly replaced long guns on the upper decks of frigates, wholly or in part; and, in most cases, ports were cut to mount additional carronades. Thus a thirty-eight-gun frigate often carried forty-nine guns, and all classes of vessels had from eight to twelve more guns than they rated. The gun-deck battery remained practically the same, with some increase in weight after the experience with the American frigates.

Line-of-battle-ships, as their name indicates, were intended to take the shock of battle between fleets. They carried guns on three or more decks. Two of these decks had full batteries, usually of thirty long guns, and carronades were placed on the quarter-deck and the forecastle. The smallest line-of-battle-ship was so vastly superior to an ordinary frigate that a captain in command of the latter was entirely justified in declining an action with the former. It was easy to escape, as the line-of-battle-ship was heavy and clumsy under sail. Nor was there any discredit in surrendering a sloop to a frigate, as few commanders would risk the lives of their men in so unequal a contest. The nomenclature was often misleading, however, as vessels in the same class varied greatly in power. At one end of the scale there were frigates carrying thirty-four guns, which fired a broadside of four hundred and fifty-four pounds, as opposed, at the other end, to frigates delivering from seven to eight hundred pounds in one broadside. Similar statements apply to sloops and line-of-battle-ships. Modern types differ almost as much, and the term "cruiser," nowadays, includes vessels of vastly different power and speed. Yet commanding officers of the old Navy felt a certain obligation to fight ships of their own rating, and were sometimes beaten by being outclassed. Some of the English

writers complained bitterly that we had deceived them at the outset of the War of 1812, because our frigates were superior to theirs, forgetting that the term "frigate" was a very elastic one, and referred only to the method of placing the guns.

In comparing the actual sizes of ships, arbitrary rules for measuring tonnage were adopted by different governments. The first law of Congress was taken from the merchant-service, which aimed mainly at the cargo-carrying capacity. The rule is given here, although somewhat technical, to show that the tonnage had no fixed relation to the displacement of a ship. "Measure from the fore part of the main stem to the after part of the stern post above the upper deck; take the breadth thereof at the broadest part above the main wales, one half of which breadth shall be counted the depth; deduct from the length three fifths of such breadth; multiplying the remainder by the breadth and the product by the depth; divide by 95: the quotient is the tonnage." The English had a similar rule, which gave a smaller result than ours by fully fifteen per cent. Even had the tonnage worked out the same for two different ships by either rule, the contents would not necessarily have been alike, on account of a difference in the lines. No reliance can be placed on comparisons based upon the earlier meas-

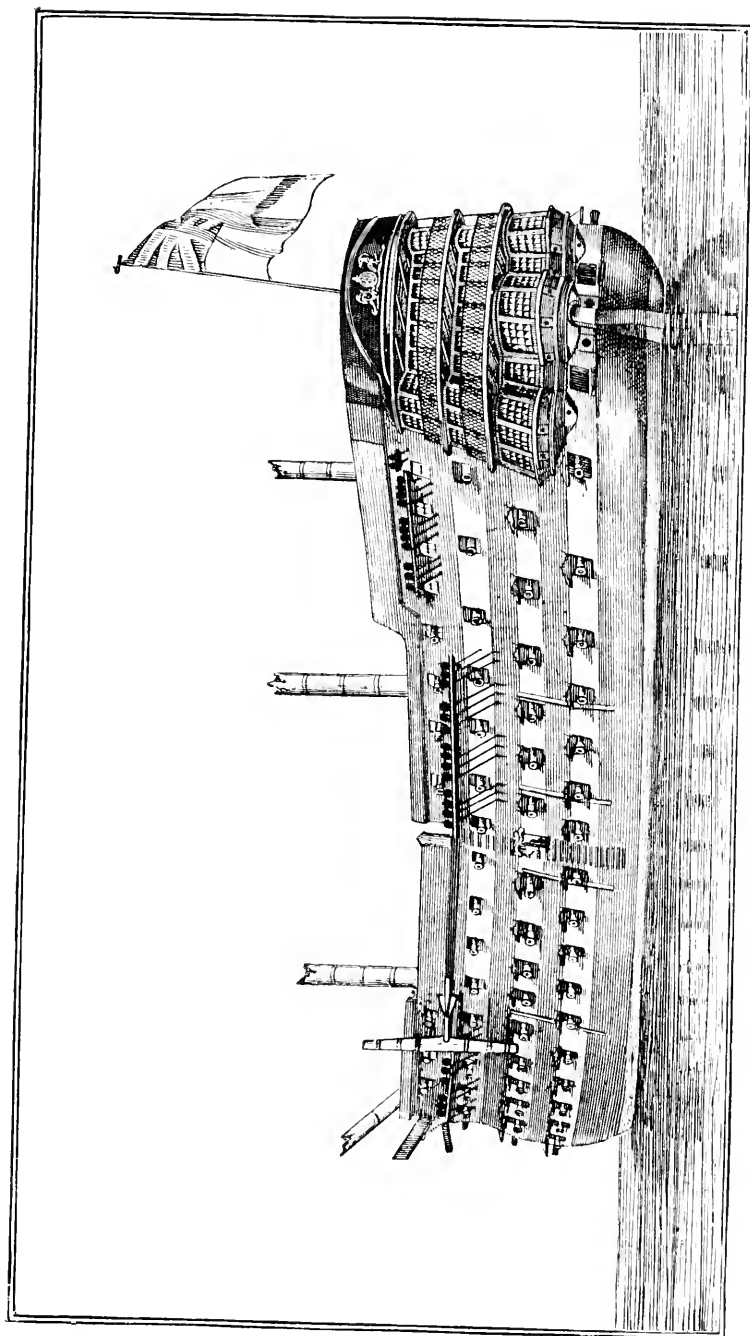
urements, but a later act of Congress placed the whole subject on a better footing. Fortunately, the question of tonnage was of very little importance in actual warfare except that it gave a rough idea of the space for handling guns, berthing the crew, and storing provisions, ammunition, and water.

The guns were mounted in crude wooden carriages formed by two brackets or sides joined together at the ends by crosspieces called transoms. They were elevated and depressed by means of handspikes placed under the breech, which always had preponderance over the muzzle, and a wedge served to hold the gun at the proper elevation. The same handspikes were also used in training the gun horizontally forward and aft with the aid of side-tackles. Breech-ropes secured to eye-bolts in the hull passed through a jaw in the rear end of the gun to limit the recoil; and several tackles served for hauling out or holding the gun in any position on deck. The rolling and pitching of a ship in a seaway immensely complicated the problem of loading and aiming, and the selection of the proper moment for firing demanded great judgment. During the discharge, the gun and carriage were thrown violently inboard, and, if the inclination of the deck happened to assist the recoil, there was danger of pulling out the bolts which

held the ropes and tackles. A heavy gun broken loose from its fastenings during action was likely to prove an ugly customer in a seaway ; more dangerous, perhaps, than the batteries of an enemy. This accident was by no means uncommon. It occurred a number of times on English frigates, and was usually credited to decayed timbers.

During the War of 1812, the British had no regulated sights for their guns, and they suffered by comparison with the Americans, who were clever enough to provide fair substitutes for the modern sight-bar. In some cases tubes were placed along the tops of the guns, with adjustments for various elevations or distances. The height of the decks above water level also had an important bearing upon the fighting qualities of a ship. Other things being equal, the vessel with the higher decks had the advantage in a rough sea. Cases have been known where line-of-battle-ships could not use their lower-deck guns at all, thus reducing them practically to frigates in power. In the battle between the *Wasp* and the *Frolic*, the former rolled her lee sides to the muzzles of the guns. It was therefore important in construction to place the decks as far as practicable above the water line, and to design the ships with special reference to a steady gun-platform. As will be seen, the American frigates were superior to the British in





BRITISH LINE-OF-BATTLE SHIP



these respects ship for ship, until the latter began to improve on the Constitution class.

When a sailing-vessel went into action she usually carried the wind abeam, and the pressure on the sails tended to steady her, but it gave her a list to leeward, and the ship to windward consequently rolled deeply towards her opponent and exposed her decks to shot, while, on the other hand, the ship to leeward lifted her sides high out of water and exposed her hull. If a shot penetrated near the normal water line and the commander found it expedient to tack, he immediately brought the hole below water on the lee side and was in danger of filling. Under any circumstances, men were called away from their duties to work the pumps or to plug the hole. The ship to windward had another advantage. The slope of the deck was toward the target, and the guns were forced to slide uphill in recoiling, thus lessening the strain on the tackles. Another consideration in connection with the windward side, or the weather gauge, as it was called, related to choice of time and position. A vessel with the weather gauge could run down and engage her antagonist at any time, or she might by heading to windward postpone action to a favorable moment. When two ships approached each other with hostile intent, their commanders usually manœuvred for advan-

tage. Each tried to get to windward of the other, and to reach a position from which his enemy could be raked by a whole broadside. Raking consisted in placing a ship at right angles to the course of another vessel, either directly astern or ahead and firing lengthwise of her decks. There were more chances of striking the masts and rigging in that position than when training across an enemy's deck. The ship which was being raked had the serious disadvantage of being able to bring only a few bow or stern guns to bear upon an opponent. The first object of American officers seems to have been to cut away an enemy's masts and rigging, thus enabling them to take a raking position.

The percussion cap was not invented until after the War of 1812. Before its introduction on board ship, guns were fired by means of a flint lock or a match. In the latter case, the powder and shot were rammed home through the muzzle, and a wire was run down the vent to pierce the powder cartridge; then a powder-horn was turned into the vent and a train laid. When the moment to fire arrived, the train was lighted by the match. All of this required time. We do not wonder, therefore, that American officers expected to expend many shots in practice for the purpose of acquiring the skill to obtain one hit against an enemy. Guns were fired preferably in broadside instead of singly,

and the battery was aimed in converging lines in order to concentrate the fire as much as possible. By aiming at the water line near a mast, the shot had three chances ; if too low, it might ricochet on the water and strike the hull ; if too high, it might bring down a mast ; while, if it struck the point aimed at, the hull was injured in a vital part.

There were three types of guns, the long gun, the carronade, and the columbiad. The long gun, which had been in use for several centuries, was cast very heavy. Its length and the weight of powder charge insured the maximum range and penetration possible at that time. The dimensions of the 18 and 24-pounders were  $5\frac{29}{100}$  inches and  $5\frac{83}{100}$  inches in bore respectively, and upwards of nine or nine and one half feet in length. The powder charge was not far from six pounds, and the range with an elevation of one degree was about six hundred yards. On account of their great weight, these guns were placed as low as possible in the ship. The carronade, which took its name from the town of Carron, where it was first made, was much lighter. A 32-pounder had a bore of  $6\frac{1}{4}$  inches and a length of four feet, and the muzzle was cast comparatively thin. The charge of powder was only  $2\frac{1}{2}$  pounds, and the range at an elevation of one degree was three hundred and eighty yards. The effect of the heavier shot was

more that of a battering-ram, and it was used at close quarters to knock in the sides of a ship rather than to penetrate. The lightness of this gun gave it a place on the highest deck, where it did not seriously reduce the stability. The columbiad was between the long gun and the carronade in size. As there is no record of its use on the Constitution or by any of her opponents in war, it is not necessary to describe it here.

The different types of guns were never equivalent in their effects, as a large shot fired with a low velocity might have the same energy as a small shot with a high velocity and yet produce a very different result. It is therefore extremely difficult to compare the power of two ships unless their batteries were composed of the same types of guns. The long gun always possessed an advantage over the others, as it could be used outside of the range of carronades and columbiads. Besides the great advantage of being able to cripple an antagonist before coming to close quarters, a ship armed with superior long guns could load and fire more deliberately. On the other hand, the carronade could be handled more quickly, and was accounted more available at short range. Mr. Roosevelt, in his "History of the War of 1812," says that a long 12-pounder, an 18-pound columbiad, and a 32-pound carronade were almost equivalent to one another.

The projectiles in common use were solid shot, shrapnel, canister, bar shot, and chain shot. The weight of the shot was not accurately given. On account of the spherical shape, it was purposely made to fit loosely in the gun, so that imperfections in manufacture could not cause it to stick in the bore. A slight variation in size or density made no difference ; consequently an eighteen-pound shot might weigh nineteen pounds and a twenty-four-pound shot only twenty-three pounds. As a matter of fact, there is good ground for believing that American shot was usually under weight, and that French shot was over weight, while the English were commonly accurate in their sizes and weights. Explosive shells with percussion fuses did not come in until long after the period of the Constitution's greatest usefulness ; nevertheless, the crews often suffered severely from flying splinters. A heavy shot striking a timber, or a wooden projection, was likely to shiver it and throw pieces in all directions. The gun-carriages themselves, being of wood, formed a great element of danger if struck.

A good estimate of the distance, or range, was vital to success unless ships were within pistol-shot of each other. For long ranges, the shot rose high in the air and fell at a plunging angle as if fired at a target lying horizontal, and it was therefore

necessary to know accurately the distance of this target. There were several methods of obtaining this distance by the help of a sextant. One of them depended upon knowing the height of the enemy's masts and by using their angular elevation in connection with a mathematical table. Another method consisted in treating the ship as the base of a horizontal triangle, of which the enemy formed the apex. The two base angles were measured simultaneously and the triangle constructed. These measurements were so crude and unsatisfactory that an engagement almost always terminated at short range where the exact distance was unimportant. The present method of taking the angle from the horizon down to the water line of a target and finding the distance from a table constructed for that purpose did not become common in the Constitution's day.

As ships often came to close quarters for the purpose of fighting their battles by a hand to hand encounter on deck, the crews were armed with pistols and cutlasses. These, with boarding-pikes placed in convenient racks, formed the best weapons for boarding an enemy, or for repelling boarders, when attacked. A few men of every gun's crew were detailed for this service, and they were called away by the sound of a large rattle. The marines were armed with muskets and stationed in places



most effective for picking off officers and men. Several men were placed in every top. It was from a ship's top that Nelson was killed at Trafalgar, and that Captain Lambert was mortally wounded in the action between the *Constitution* and the *Java*.

Ships usually went into action under topsails, topgallant-sails, jib and spanker; the courses, the lowest square sails, were hauled up, and the light sails overhead were furled. Sometimes the topgallant-sails were also furled, and in squally weather the heavy sails were reefed. The clews, or lower corners of the square sails, were stopped to the yards to keep the sails spread in case the sheets were shot away, and the yards were hung in slings for greater security. The pumps were rigged and every precaution was taken against fire and water. Tubs of water were placed in the channels, and the decks were thoroughly wet down and sanded to make the footing secure. Ammunition was collected near the guns. The men went to their stations at the beat of a drum, a certain number to each gun, and a few to look after the general management of the ship under sail. The members of the guns' crews were numbered, and every number had specified duties for all emergencies that might arise. At a given signal certain men were called away from the guns to extinguish fire, to trim sails, to

repair rigging and spars, to repel boarders, or to board another ship, depending upon the demands of the occasion. In the midst of a scene of apparently indescribable confusion, there was really the most perfect order, as every man in a crew of four or five hundred knew and could recite his duties for every contingency of ordinary cruising or action.

Many of the old sailing-vessels were overcrowded, and men lived almost like kenneled dogs. Each enlisted man had only twenty-two inches by eight feet of deck room for his hammock, and that on an unventilated deck near the water line. Air could be obtained only by means of canvas ducts, or windsails, hoisted to catch the passing breeze. Some commanders, like Captain Porter, permitted the men to sleep on the gun-deck, and thus gave them more breathing-space, but this practice was not prescribed by the navy regulation. The officers had bunks in the after part of the ship, where there was more room, but even they must have suffered from overcrowding. The quarters in the lower part of the Constitution are unventilated, and it would seem impossible to live in them over night; yet men managed to occupy them and to enjoy life on board ship. Some conception of the limited space for the crew is afforded by the relative dimensions of the Constitution and a modern battleship.

The crews are practically the same, and yet the latter is five times the size of the former. Even this does not express the relative comfort in the two cases, as a sailing-vessel necessarily remained at sea for long and uncertain periods, and the men could not relieve the tedium of life by frequent outings on shore. The element in favor of the old ships was the absence of coal and steam.

The crews often suffered from disease, scurvy being not at all uncommon. The record of the *Constitution's* log shows a daily sick list varying from eighteen to twenty-seven out of a crew of four hundred and sixty-eight during the month preceding the action with the *Guerriere*; and on some of her cruises, the sick list ran up into alarming numbers. Bad ventilation and salt food were not alone responsible. Medical science was in its infancy, and the surgeons had neither the means nor the skill to combat diseases now easily treated by well-trained physicians. Then, too, they were entirely dependent upon water from the shore, which frequently introduced sickness and epidemics on board ship. Few can realize what distilled water, good ventilation, and canned meats have done for the sailors of our day.

In the United States Navy, the diet was not unwholesome, but it was fearfully monotonous at sea, where all provisions were dried or salted. The

ration fixed by Congress in 1801 for each man is given in the following table :—

*Sunday.* —  $1\frac{1}{4}$  lbs. beef, 14 oz. bread,  $\frac{1}{2}$  lb. flour,  $\frac{1}{4}$  lb. suet,  $\frac{1}{2}$  pint spirits.

*Monday.* — 1 lb. pork, 14 oz. bread,  $\frac{1}{2}$  pint peas,  $\frac{1}{2}$  pint spirits.

*Tuesday.* — 1 lb. beef, 14 oz. bread, 2 oz. cheese,  $\frac{1}{2}$  pint spirits.

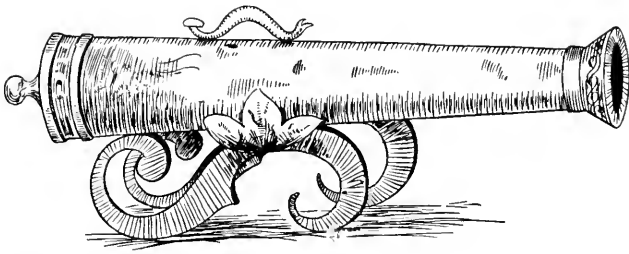
*Wednesday.* — 1 lb. pork, 14 oz. bread,  $\frac{1}{2}$  pint rice,  $\frac{1}{2}$  pint spirits.

*Thursday.* —  $1\frac{1}{4}$  lbs. beef, 14 oz. bread,  $\frac{1}{2}$  lb. flour,  $\frac{1}{4}$  lb. suet,  $\frac{1}{2}$  pint spirits.

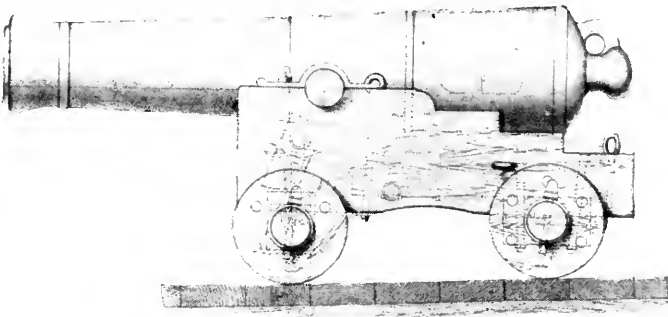
*Friday.* — 14 oz. bread,  $\frac{1}{2}$  pint rice, 4 oz. cheese, 2 oz. butter,  $\frac{1}{2}$  pint molasses,  $\frac{1}{2}$  pint spirits.

*Saturday.* — 1 lb. pork, 14 oz. bread,  $\frac{1}{2}$  pint peas,  $\frac{1}{2}$  pint vinegar,  $\frac{1}{2}$  pint spirits.

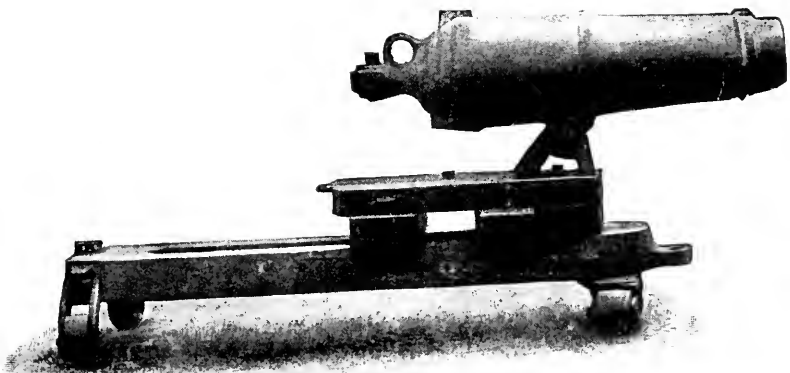
Bread and spirits appear with unfailing regularity, the one usually stale and the other always good. Sometimes in port the men got fresh provisions by commuting a certain number of rations to be paid in money. They were often able to lay in potatoes and onions for themselves. The crew of a ship were divided into messes with from eight to twelve men in each mess for the convenience of supplying them. There was a ship's cook for all, and one boy for each mess. The latter drew the provisions from the purser and took general care of the outfits. Their lot was not an enviable one



*Long Gun*



*Brass Howitzer*



*Carronade*

ORDNANCE OF 1800



under the best of conditions. Although there was much sickness and many deaths at sea, it was possible, as Captain Porter demonstrated in the *Essex* by strict regulation as to diet and cleanliness, to keep a crew in good health for long periods. A sailor required in those days, as in these, as much looking after as a child. The grog question did not become a burning one until later, when, fortunately for the Navy, the spirit ration was abolished. The *Constitution* often carried six months' sea stores, and, as the amount required for the daily issue was about twenty-eight gallons, the cargo of whiskey placed on board must have been fully one hundred barrels. It formed the largest single item of expense for the stores of a ship.

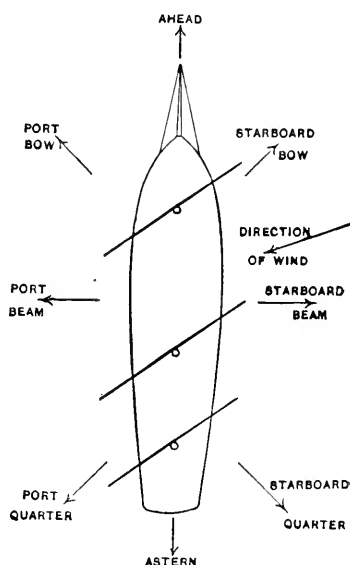
There was a great difference between the American and British navies in the treatment of men. We had no imprisonment for petty offenses, and our system of punishments was more humane. Flogging was limited to a dozen lashes with plain cat-o'-nine-tails. Lord Dundonald says of the British Navy, "No man acquainted with the facts can wonder that interminable cruises, prohibition to land in port, constant confinement without salutary change of food and consequent disease endangering total disability, should have excited disgust and often terror of a sailor's life." We had no such complaint as this; but, nevertheless, the lot

of a sailor was hard. He was everybody's slave at sea and beneath notice on shore, as he really was too often a drunkard and a ne'er-do-well. Every generation has its victims, men whose lives go to the service of others. Jack Tar belongs to all generations, and his emancipation is still in the future. In spite of all the drawbacks of service in the Old Navy, many men acquired a genuine love for the seafaring life and grew attached to their ships. There was enough change and adventure to satisfy the cravings of most sailors, especially in the large demands made upon our early sailing-vessels. Their spirit and sense of humor are exhibited in the nicknames given to their guns, ships, and, sometimes, to their officers.

When the Navy was first organized, it was very difficult to enlist sailors of American birth. Ships were manned largely by foreigners. Notwithstanding the lack of protection offered by the government to our merchant-ships on the high seas, foreign commerce was so profitable as to draw all native born seamen into the merchant-service. They could get higher pay there than in the Navy. The consequence was the enlisting for the Navy of the flotsam to be found in every maritime city. For several years previous to 1812 the case was somewhat different, as many American sailors were driven on shore by the embargo and the imminence



of war ; so that there was no scarcity of men for the service when the war broke out. A large number were attracted, no doubt, by the prospect of prize money. The American sailor was handy at all kinds of work — a kind of Jack-of-all-trades. He was quick at repairing damages to his ship, and remarkably apt at gunnery. The nucleus in every ship was native born in its commission and warrant officers, whose discipline and instruction brought even mixed crews to a high state of efficiency. It is said that Nelson remarked of Commodore Dale's squadron in the Mediterranean, "There is in the handling of those transatlantic ships a nucleus of trouble for the Navy of Great Britain."



DECK PLAN OF A SHIP ON  
STARBOARD TACK

## CHAPTER II

### THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE UNITED STATES NAVY

THE Revolutionary War left the country in a very unsettled condition. It was impoverished by the long struggle, and knew imperfectly how to maintain the independence which it had spent so much blood and treasure to secure. The States were still colonies with only loose notions of coöperation, and there was no real central government with power and money to provide for the nation's many wants. Some years of experience with no government were required to convince the colonies of the value of union under national executive, legislative, and judicial heads. In this state of affairs there was no thought of dealing adequately with the problem of national defense, still less with that part of it belonging to the sea. The old Continental Navy, or what was left of it, was sold, and in the fall of 1785 not an armed vessel remained in the possession of the united colonies. The frigate *Alliance*, which had seen active service during

the war, was the last to go. She became an East Indiaman, and was ultimately wrecked on an island in the Delaware. The *America*, the only line-of-battle-ship built by the colonies, was presented to Louis XVI. in 1782, in testimony of the country's gratitude for his generous exertion in its behalf and to replace the *Magnifique*, a 74-gun ship lost in the harbor of Boston. She was afterwards captured by the British. As every colony, or State, had its own custom-house, and to a large extent made its own revenue and navigation laws, several States maintained armed vessels for defense and revenue service ; but this did not constitute a navy or even an organized force.

The Agent of Marine summed up the naval question in his report for August, 1783. He wrote that " the situation of the public treasury renders it not advisable to purchase ships for the present, nor until the several States shall grant such funds for the construction of ships, docks and naval arsenals, and for the support of the naval service, as shall enable the United States to establish their marine upon a permanent and respectable footing." As a result of this report the State of Virginia was authorized by Congress to arm two vessels at its own expense. Six years passed, during which the Constitution was discussed and adopted and the United States came into actual existence. With

the internal machinery to be set going, the external relations became a source of grave anxiety to the new government. Europe was on the eve of a great upheaval, in which despotic power as represented by Napoleon was to engage in a death struggle with the real democracy for which England stood. Allied to one nation by blood and tradition, and under obligation to the other for comfort and aid in adversity, our path was destined to be a thorny one for nearly a generation. To make it more painful, we were forced into war with each of these great powers in turn through sheer inability to maintain neutrality between them. The domestic and foreign debt pressed so heavily that the nation was obliged to submit to any humiliation rather than to spend money on a navy, the only arm capable of earning for us a position among nations.

To add to the bitterness of this situation, the Barbary powers discovered the new flag upon the seas immediately after the treaty of peace with Great Britain. Two ships were captured just outside of the Mediterranean by the Algerine corsairs in 1785, and their crews were held in bondage. There was no reason for this attack upon our commerce. It was a clear case of piracy. The country rang with cries of indignation, but we were powerless to exact reparation, and we had to submit. In accordance with the well-established practice of Christian

nations, we embarked on the fatal policy of negotiating and attempting to ransom the poor captives who for no wrong had been set at hard labor. They were treated in all respects as slaves of the Dey, and their lot was indeed sad. Agents were appointed to negotiate and treat, with authority to offer a ransom for the prisoners, but the sum allowed was much too small. The Dey demanded \$59,496 for twenty-one men, and the agents departed without having accomplished anything.

In 1787, the American minister at Paris was authorized to place the business in the hands of the Mathurins, a religious order formed for the redemption of Christian captives from the Barbary pirates. It was hoped that they could secure the liberation of our people at a lower rate. The General of the order recommended the discontinuance of any allowance for the comfort of the captives, in order to impress upon the Algerines the fact that nothing much could be expected from the United States. He feared that by paying a large amount we might raise the market value of Americans and turn the pirates against our ships as the greater gain. He was authorized to offer \$550 a man, but unfortunately a year elapsed before the money could be deposited in Paris and made available. In the mean time several other nations had redeemed a number of slaves, and the price had

gone up, so that the assistance of the Mathurins proved of no avail. Five years passed, and our sailors were still in captivity, made even more wretched by our endeavors to rescue them. We had cut off their allowance, and we were still haggling over the price of redemption.

In 1790, President Washington laid before Congress a full report on Algiers, by the Secretary of State, in order that they might provide what seemed most expedient on behalf of our citizens in captivity. It is astonishing in these days to read so mild a message on a subject so burning. Twenty-one of our citizens were in slavery to a nest of pirates, and yet Congress did nothing. We made only another attempt to negotiate. It is fair to say that our government was not alone in its weak, half-hearted policy. The Christian nations of Europe had been for three centuries, more or less, under tribute to the corsairs of North Africa, and the ports of Algiers, Tunis, and Tripoli were often crowded with slaves captured from the coasts of the Mediterranean, and from the merchant-ships that ventured to ply its waters. From time to time peace was bought and yearly tribute was agreed upon. Even England, Holland, and Russia were parties to these debasing treaties. There was probably at the bottom of this system of tribute a certain amount of commercial jealousy, and every

nation was likely to encourage depredations against its neighbors. By paying tribute to go free and keeping the Barbary pirates strong enough to capture the ships of other nations an enormous advantage was gained to a selfish power. Thus all the governments of Europe were gradually drawn into secret treaties, whereas a united front would have broken up the whole infamous business. The United States eventually made the first really successful effort to shake off this yoke of Christendom, and the power of the corsairs declined from the time of our first serious campaign against them. How this war in which the Constitution formed the central figure came about will be told in connection with the resolutions of Congress to build a navy.

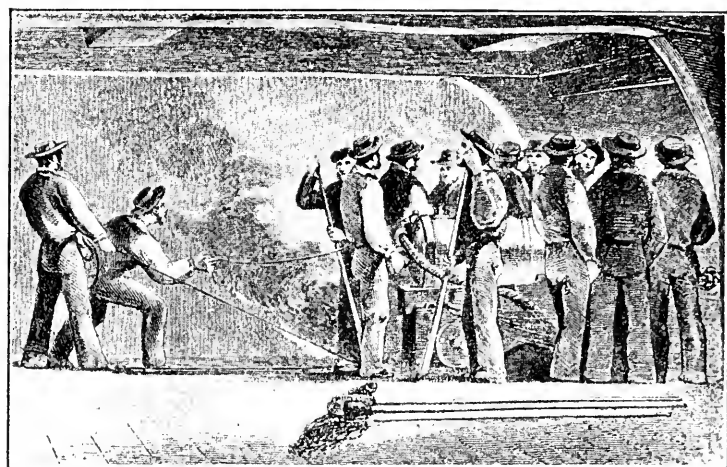
In 1792, the President suggested a plan for concluding a treaty of peace with Algiers, and for obtaining the release of American captives, and it was approved. The sum of \$40,000 was to be paid for the captives, \$25,000 for a treaty, and an annual tribute of \$25,000. After some delay the negotiations were placed in the hands of Colonel David Humphreys, our minister to Portugal, and they might have been successful but for another unfortunate occurrence. Our merchant-ships were in the habit of collecting at Lisbon and entering the Mediterranean under convoy of the Portuguese, who were at war with Algiers. They had estab-

lished a blockade of the Straits against all pirates, and we were therefore perfectly secure in the Atlantic. Before Colonel Humphreys could reach Algiers a truce had been arranged between the Dey and Portugal, which let the fleet of the former into the Atlantic and deprived us of a convoy. This arrangement was made by the English consul without consulting Portugal. The latter had expressed a wish for the friendly coöperation of England in securing peace, but had expected ample time to warn its friends that they could no longer receive the protection of Portuguese convoy. England was accused at the time of aiming a direct blow at the growing commerce of the United States by letting loose the pirates against us. Whether this was true or not, it was quite in line with the policy of Europe and the policy of the British government towards us. Treaties with other nations left our ships the only prey, and the Dey refused even to receive Colonel Humphreys. "Let the American ambassador take care how he comes here under the protection of any flag whatever." He declared his policy in a few words. "If I were to make peace with everybody, what should I do with my corsairs? What should I do with my soldiers? They would take off my head for the want of other prizes, not being able to live on their miserable allowance."





*Training*



*Firing*

DRILL AT THE GUNS



In October, 1793, eight Algerine vessels appeared in the Atlantic, and within a few weeks they had captured eleven American ships and 106 American sailors. It is no wonder that our consul writes from Lisbon, "Another corsair in the Atlantic: God preserve us!" Captain O'Brien, one of the captives, wrote from Algiers in December, 1793, explaining the great danger to American shipping if a fleet of swift-sailing vessels were not fitted out at once for their protection. He also added that the corsairs of Algiers and Tunis would remain masters of the Western Ocean, and would be tempted to go to the coast of the United States. A petition to the House of Representatives, signed by the masters of thirteen vessels, accompanied his letter. They wrote in behalf of 109 prisoners, whose piteous appeal could not fail to move the American people. The petition closed with the following: "Your petitioners pray you will take their unfortunate situation into consideration, and adopt such measures as will restore the American captives to their country, their friends, families and connections; and your petitioners will ever pray and be thankful." Some of them had prayed during eight years of hard labor.

Yet when this petition with all the facts reached Congress it produced only a small majority in favor of equipping a naval force. The opposition

was powerful and insistent. There was no idea of forming a permanent navy, and the vessels were finally authorized by a compromise directing the discontinuance of work on them in case a treaty should be arranged before their completion. The act to provide a naval armament was approved on March 27, 1794. The bill as passed allowed the President the option of building four ships of 44 guns each, and two ships of 36 guns each, or of procuring an equivalent force by purchase. Officers and enlisted men were also provided for.

Although President Washington had not given up hope of a treaty, he lost no time in proceeding with the six ships. There was no Navy Department, and the whole subject was referred to Henry Knox, the Secretary of War, who consulted several experienced ship-builders on the properties and models of the new ships. The plans of Mr. Joshua Humphreys, a well-known ship-builder of Philadelphia, were accepted, and he was directed to prepare models of the six frigates for transmission to various places, as follows: —

Boston	. . .	44-gun frigate	. Constitution	✓
New York	. . .	“ “	. President	
Philadelphia	. . .	“ “	. United States	
Norfolk	. . .	“ “	. Chesapeake	
Baltimore	. . .	36-gun “	. Constellation	
Portsmouth, N. H.	. . .	“ “	. Congress	

For some reason the battery of the Chesapeake was subsequently changed to 36 guns, so that there were three of each class built. Mr. Humphreys was appointed constructor of the 44-gun ship to be built at Philadelphia. Although the interest in his ships is now mainly sentimental and historical, the considerations which led to the adoption of his designs are worthy of more extended treatment. His ideas, with but slight changes of expression, still apply in the modern Navy. A separate chapter will therefore be given to the American frigate and Mr. Humphreys. The selection of Boston for the Constitution was a happy one, both on account of the skill of the New England ship-builders and the influence which she was destined to have upon our common feeling of nationality. Curiously enough, the Constitution, the Hartford, and the Merrimac, participants in the three most momentous naval actions of our history, were constructed at Boston, which has rarely shown a lack of public spirit. The frigate Adams was built by the subscription of her citizens in 1798 and presented to the government.

## CHAPTER III

### DESCRIPTION, ARMAMENT, AND CREW OF THE CONSTITUTION

WHEN the establishment of a navy was discussed in Congress, the nation was fortunate in having at the seat of government a naval architect of pronounced views and of considerable experience. Joshua Humphreys had early turned his attention to shipbuilding, and had given much thought to the construction of armed vessels for the Navy. At the age of twenty-five he built the frigate *Randolph*, of unhappy memory, and later superintended fitting out a galley and several other ships for use in the Revolutionary War. When the agitation for a new navy began in the latter part of Washington's first administration, Mr. Humphreys wrote to Robert Morris on the subject. The strong common sense of his letter, which is here reproduced, should have disposed of all the subsequent controversies over the superiority of the American frigates.

SOUTHWARK, Jan. 6, 1793.

ROBERT MORRIS, ESQ. :

SIR, — From the present appearance of affairs I believe it is time this country was possessed of a navy; but as that is yet to be raised, I have ventured a few remarks on the subject.

Ships that compose the European navys are generally distinguished by their rates; but as the situation and depth of water of our coasts and harbors are different in some degrees from those in Europe, and as our navy for a considerable time will be inferior in numbers, we are to consider what size ships will be most formidable, and be an overmatch for those of an enemy; such frigates as in blowing weather would be an overmatch for double-deck ships, and in light winds to evade coming to action; or double-deck ships that would be an overmatch for common double-deck ships, and in blowing weather superior to ships of three decks, or in calm weather or light winds to outsail them. Ships built on these principles will render those of an enemy in a degree useless, or require a greater number before they dare attack our ships. Frigates, I suppose, will be the first object, and none ought to be built less than 150 feet keel, to carry twenty-eight 32-pounders or thirty 24-pounders on the gun deck, and 12-pounders on the quarter-deck. These ships should have scantlings equal to 74's, and I believe may be built of red cedar and live oak for about twenty-four pounds per ton, carpenters' tonnage, including carpenters', smiths' bill, including anchors, joiners, block makers, mast makers, riggers and rigging,

sail makers and sail cloths, suits and chandlers' bill. As such ships will cost a large sum of money, they should be built of the best materials that could possibly be procured. The beams for their decks should be of the best Carolina pine, and the lower futtocks and knees, if possible, of live oak.

The greatest care should be taken in the construction of such ships, and particularly all her timbers should be framed and bolted together before they are raised. Frigates built to carry 12 and 18-pounders, in my opinion, will not answer the expectation contemplated from them; for if we should be obliged to take a part in the present European war, or at a future day we should be dragged into a war with any powers of the Old Continent, especially Great Britain, they having such a number of ships of that size, that it would be an equal chance by equal combat that we lose our ships, and more particularly from the Algerians, who have ships, and some of much greater force. Several questions will arise, whether one large or two small frigates contribute most to the protection of our trade, or which will cost the least sum of money, or whether two small ones are as able to engage a double-deck ship as one large one. For my part I am decidedly of opinion the large ones will answer best.

(Signed)

JOSHUA HUMPHREYS.

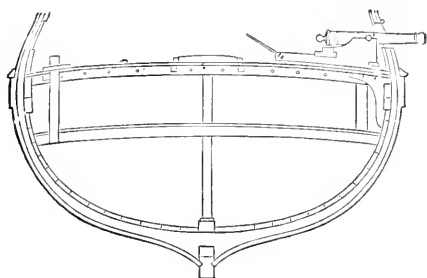
Again he writes: —

All the maritime powers of Europe being possessed of a great number of ships of the first size contemplated,

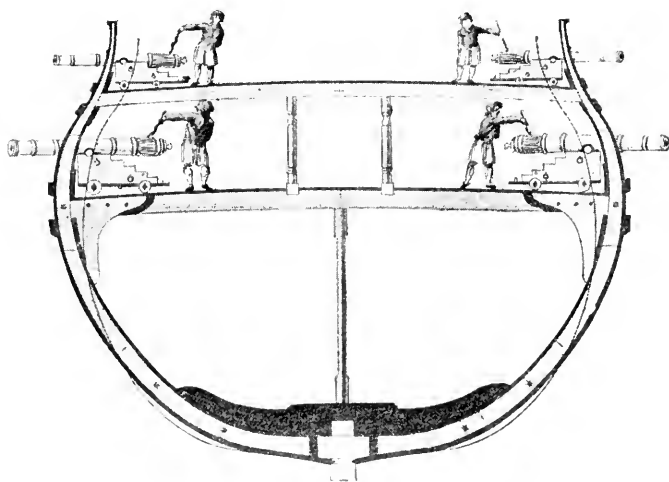


and the Algerians having several, and considering the small number of ships directed to be built, the great necessity of constructing those ships in such a way as to render them less liable to be captured and more capable of rendering great services to the United States according to their number, the construction and sizes of frigates of the European nations were resorted to and their usefulness carefully considered. It was determined of importance to this country to take the lead in a class of ships not in use in Europe, which would be the only means of making our little navy of any importance. It would oblige other Powers to follow us intact, instead of our following them ; considering at the same time it was not impossible we should be brought into a war with some of the European nations ; and if we should be so engaged, and had ships of equal size with theirs, for want of experience and discipline, which cannot immediately be expected, in an engagement we should not have an equal chance, and probably lose our ships. Ships of the present construction have everything in their favor ; their great length gives them the advantage of sailing, which is an object of the first magnitude. They are superior to any European frigate, and if others should be in company, our frigates can always lead ahead and never be obliged to go into action, but on their own terms, except in a calm ; in blowing weather our ships are capable of engaging to advantage double-deck ships. Those reasons weighed down all objections.

When General Knox took the matter up in the following year he placed the designs for ships in Mr. Humphreys' hands, as already stated, and the latter's ideas were carried out almost to the letter. No doubt officers who had served in the Continental Navy gave many valuable suggestions as to details. The hull of the Constitution was modeled after the best French practice. Her lines were fairly fine, and the upper parts of the sides tumbled home so as to make the upper deck perceptibly narrower than the gun-deck below it. This model was thought to render the motion in a seaway less abrupt, and thus an easy and regular roll could afford the gunners a better platform from which to aim. The narrowing of the deck brought the rigging closer to the mast, and permitted the yards to be braced more sharply for sailing on the wind. The Constitution's general qualities were well stated in Emmons' "Statistical History of the United States Navy," published in 1853. "Her log-book to 1809 shows a speed of  $12\frac{1}{2}$  knots per hour, going free under topgallant-sails; but by common report she enjoys an enviable reputation which has no doubt been enhanced by the able manner in which she has usually been commanded, and the good fortune that has always attended her. She has always been heavily sparred, and from her peculiar build (tumbling in above water)



*Sloop-of-War*



*Frigate*

SECTIONS OF WAR-VESSELS

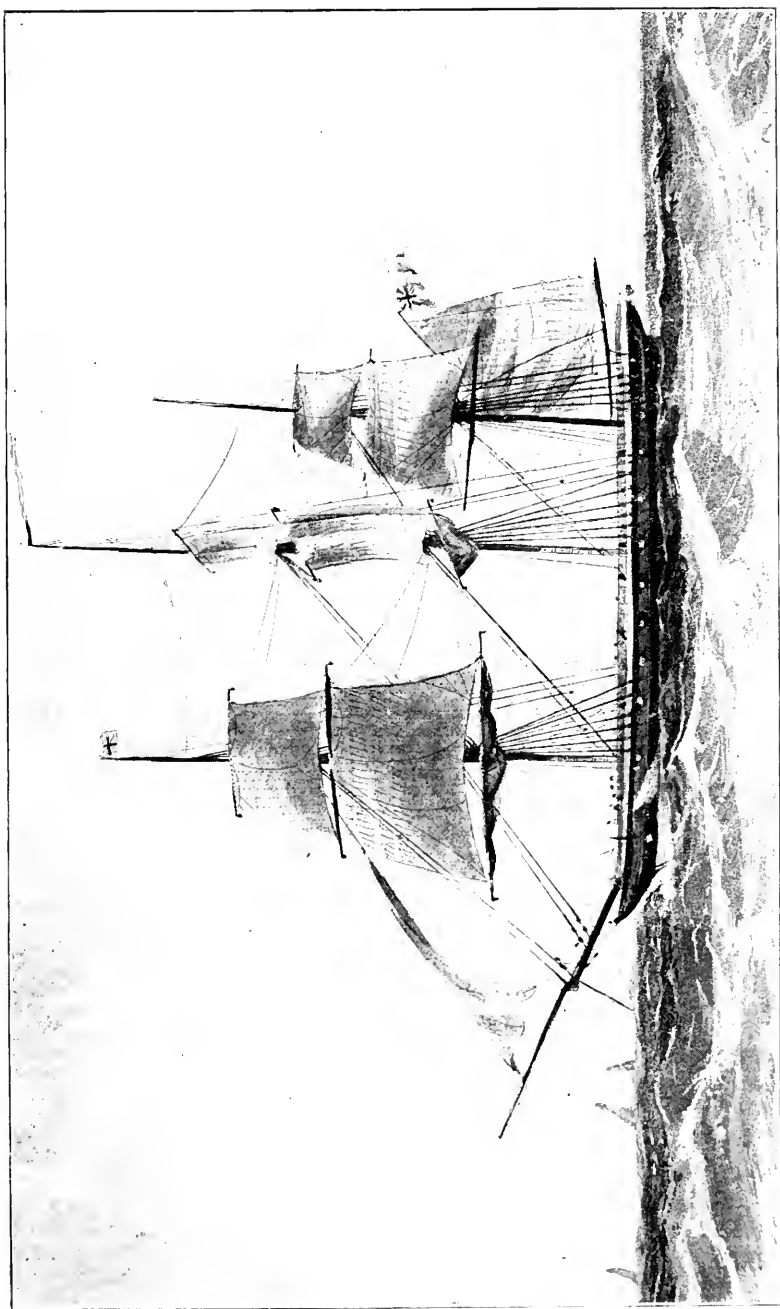


has furnished her masts less angular support from her shrouds than is now obtained in our modern frigates. The latter cause, combined with sharpness of vessel, heavy live oak frames, heavy battery and too much ballast (which has since been reduced to seven tons, with a recommendation from her commander, Captain Percival, that this also be dispensed with), has generally rendered her weight an uncomfortable thing, a seaway hard on her cables, and no doubt was the principal cause of her laboring so much as to roll or pitch one of her long 24-pounders out of her forecastle port." In 1851 her commander reports that she "works within eleven points of the wind; steers, works, sails, scuds, and lies-to well; rolls deep and easy, and sailing close-hauled has beaten everything sailed with."

Her dimensions were as follows: Length over all, 204 feet; length on load water line, 175 feet; breadth of beam, 43.6 feet; depth of hold, 14.3 feet; draught forward, 21 feet; draught aft, 23 feet. She sailed best at this trim. Her tonnage by old measurements was 1576; later this was changed to 1607, and by a still later law to 1335. Her displacement was 2200 tons. She carried at first about 140 tons of ballast, which proved to be too much, but was not taken out until many years afterwards. As stated above, it was ultimately

reduced to 7 tons. Her tanks held 48,600 gallons of water, and the hold stowed six months' provisions for a crew of 475 men. The height of the gun-deck port sills was from 8 to 9 feet above the water line. For purposes of comparison the following dimensions of the British 38-gun frigates are taken from James's "Naval Occurrences: " Length over all, 180.3 feet; length on load water line, 154.5 feet; beam, 38.8 feet; depth of hold, 13.5 feet. It will be seen from this that the Constitution was 20 feet longer and about 5 feet broader.

With uncommon foresight Mr. Humphreys made the hull frames, the planking, and the masts of his ships fully equal in dimensions to those in a line-of-battle-ship. In fact, although strictly a frigate-built ship, the British were not entirely without reason in calling the Constitution a disguised line-of-battle-ship. She did correspond somewhat to a razeed seventy-four; that is, a three-decked ship with the spar-deck removed and guns on only two decks. The first act of the British government after several conflicts between the American and British frigates was to cut down some of their line-of-battle-ships in order to overmatch the President and the Constitution with ships of their own rating. The unusual hardness and weight of the timbers and the planking in the Constitution gave her the



A SLOOP-OF-WAR





name of "Old Ironsides." The greater height of the guns above water was also an advantage. She could go into action in weather which rolled the gun-ports of the ordinary frigate and line-of-battle-ship under water.

Mr. Humphreys' design of the masts, yards, and rigging was in every way admirable. The extra beam given to all his ships afforded a better angle in staying the masts to resist rolling in a seaway, and the increased diameter of the several parts gave much greater stiffness in case the rigging was cut, or part of a mast itself was cut away by shot. The advantage here cannot be overestimated. Most of the engagements were fought with the ships rolling and a pressure of wind on the sails. Even a slight looseness of the shrouds was dangerous. It must be remembered that we are referring to the days of hemp rigging and of hemp cables for the anchors. Commodore Morris relates of the first ship in which he went to sea, the Congress, that she was dismasted in a gale. Her rigging had been fitted during the winter. She left Newport in January, and in a few days ran into much warmer weather. The rigging slackened up and did not afford sufficient support to the mainmast, which fell overboard in a gale of wind. Without the rigging, a ship's masts one hundred years ago would probably have gone overboard in a heavy

sea even though no sails were set. Hence the very great danger during an engagement, if the standing rigging was much cut, and the advisability of making all the parts extra heavy. The Constitution was not exceptionally well built for an American frigate in this respect. Her sides tumbled home so much that the masts could not be stayed to the best advantage. Many complaints were made by her commanding officers of the weakness of the channels, probably that part of the side to which the lower end of the rigging was secured.

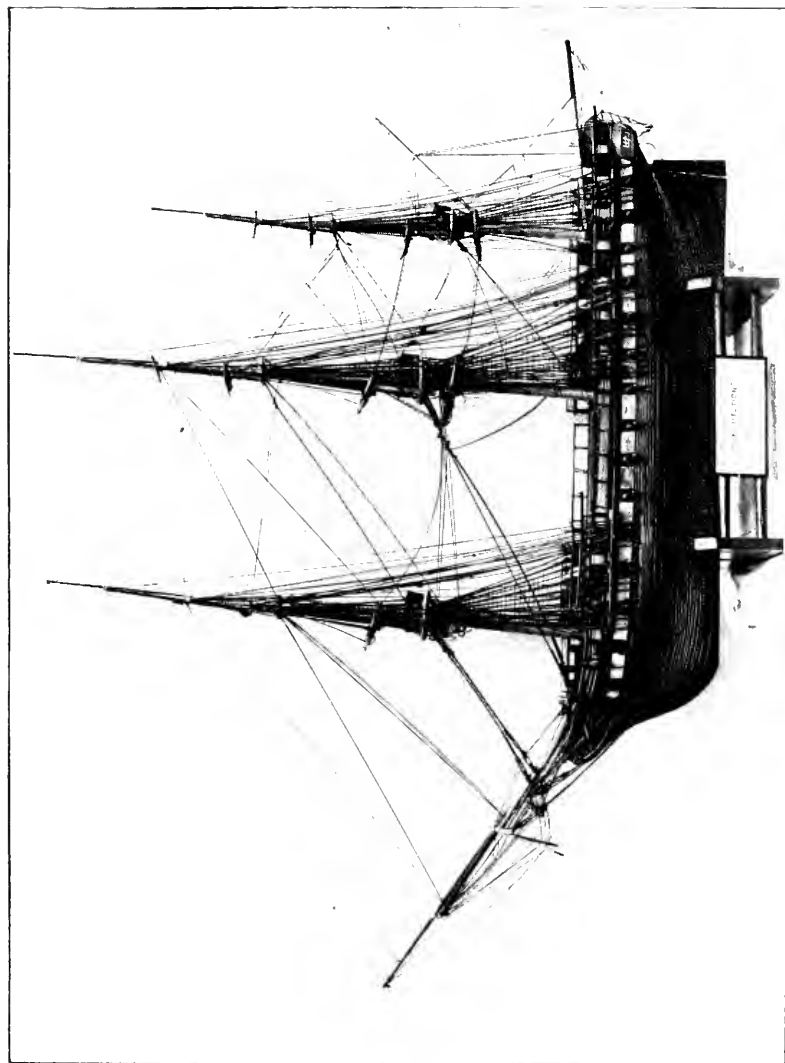
Notwithstanding the improvements made by Mr. Humphreys, the merits of the Constitution were not discovered until after she had destroyed two British frigates. At the beginning of the century English officers had been disposed to treat our new ships contemptuously, criticising their batteries as too heavy and their general design as too clumsy. They had ample opportunity to examine the Constitution in the West Indies and the Mediterranean, and the general opinion seemed to be that she was too heavy for the rapid manœuvring demanded of a frigate. Some of the British newspapers went even further, and referred in derision to all of Mr. Humphreys' ships as "fir-built frigates." The real fact is, that the first success of the Constitution and her sister ships effected almost a revolution in the design and armament of foreign

war-vessels, just as the Monitor, fifty years later, practically created the modern battle-ship. An English authority, writing in 1840, says, "It is but justice in regard to America to mention that England has benefited by her example, and that the large class of frigates now employed in the British service are modeled after those of the United States."

There has never been any doubt since 1812 of the superiority of these ships over everything of their class afloat during their first sixteen years. Mr. Humphreys planned them to excel in every respect, and he lived to see his expectations fulfilled. In committing himself to long 24-pound guns for the main-deck batteries, he was really striking out in a new path. Only a few frigates had previously carried such heavy guns, and they were not looked upon as examples to be followed. An 18-pounder was regarded as the effective limit for good workable frigates. Perhaps this departure from the ordinary type did as much as anything else to bring our young navy into ridicule abroad.

The first battery placed on board the Constitution was bought in England, and bore the stamp G. R. It consisted of twenty-eight long 24-pounders on the gun-deck, and ten long 12-pounders on the quarter-deck. These were carried through the war of reprisal against France, and the main-deck

battery was used against the English in 1812. In 1804 Commodore Preble obtained at Naples six 24-pounders, which he mounted on the spar-deck for use against the Tripolitans. The upper deck guns were afterwards exchanged for 42-pound carronades, but these were found too heavy for the hull, and Captain Hull replaced them with 32-pound carronades. In the beginning of 1812 we find her, therefore, with a battery somewhat lighter than those of her sister ships, the *President* and the *United States*. She carried on the gun-deck thirty long 24-pounders, on the quarter-deck sixteen 32-pound carronades, and on the forecastle six 32-pound carronades, one long 18-pounder, and two long 24-pounders as bow chasers. After Hull's victory two of the carronades were taken out, leaving her with fifty-three guns in all. The battery from 1815 to the present time is unimportant; and, besides, it has not been carefully recorded. In 1860, she still had fifty guns on board, but they were shortly afterwards reduced in number, and she went back to Annapolis in 1865 with seventeen guns. While serving as a training-ship for apprentices in the latter part of the seventies she carried eighteen guns. Now she has none. It is probable that her battery during the War of 1812 was too heavy, and this may explain the hogging which was discovered and corrected in 1834.



MODEL OF THE CONSTITUTION



The crew was fixed by Congress in 1794 at 359 officers and men, but the Navy Department increased this to 400 in 1798,—22 officers and 378 petty officers, seamen, and marines. The number was further increased to nearly 500 officers and men, doubtless when the carronades were added to the battery. The following list of men is taken from Goldsborough's "Naval Chronicle: "—

Commander . . . . .	1
Lieutenants . . . . .	4
Lieut. Marines . . . . .	2
Sailing-master . . . . .	1
Master's Mates . . . . .	2
Midshipmen . . . . .	8
Purser . . . . .	1
Surgeon . . . . .	1
Surgeon's Mates . . . . .	2
Clerk . . . . .	1
Carpenter . . . . .	1
Carpenter's Mates . . . . .	2
Boatswain . . . . .	1
Boatswain's Mates . . . . .	2
Yeoman of gun-room . . . . .	1
Gunner . . . . .	1
Quarter-gunners . . . . .	11
Coxswain . . . . .	1
Sailmaker . . . . .	1
Cooper . . . . .	1
Steward . . . . .	1

Armorer . . . . .	1
Master-at-Arms . . . . .	1
Cook . . . . .	1
Chaplain . . . . .	1
Able Seamen . . . . .	120
Ordinary Seamen . . . . .	150
Boys . . . . .	30
Marines, including sergeants and corporals . . . . .	50
Total . . . . .	<hr/> 400

The pay fixed by Congress in 1794 and subsequently amended in 1799 for the officers, reckoning in the value of commuted rations, was as follows: captain, \$2017.60 per year; lieutenant, \$786.60; surgeon, \$804.40; chaplain, sailing-master, purser, \$684.40; surgeon's mate, lieutenant of marines, \$564.40; boatswain, gunner, sailmaker, carpenter, \$444.40; midshipman, \$432.40. The pay of the petty officers averaged about \$19.00 per month, with the addition of one or two rations, and the enlisted men received from \$8.00 to \$17.00 per month. The total running expenses of the Constitution, including pay, provisions, medicines and miscellaneous expenditures, amounted to about \$125,000 per year. Her original cost was \$302,719, which included about \$93,000 for the guns and equipment. The repairs on her up to 1850 amounted to \$495,236.



## CHAPTER IV

### CONSTRUCTION AND FIRST SERVICE OF THE CONSTITUTION

THE system under which the Constitution was built seems to have been radically different from the present common practice. The materials for the hull and equipment were purchased by the Treasury Department and supplied to the builders. All labor and unimportant materials were procured by naval agents who received a commission of two and one half per cent on approved bills. The captain appointed to command the ship was ordered to superintend the construction and equipment, while the naval constructor had the immediate responsibility of the workmen employed, of the materials put into the ship, of the launching, and in general of all that went towards producing a frigate mechanically perfect and complete in accordance with the plans supplied by Mr. Humphreys. The actual builder, or master mechanic, in whose yard the vessel was constructed, had no responsibility beyond doing good work. Immediately after the

plans were prepared, Mr. John T. Morgan, a master shipwright of Boston, was sent to Savannah and Charleston to select live oak, red cedar, and hard pine for all the new frigates. The Secretary of War reported to Congress "that everything, if not to be created, was to be modified. That the wood of which the frames were to be made was standing in the forests; the iron for the cannon lying in its natural bed; and the flax and hemp, perhaps, in their seed." The first tree felled for the Constitution was an oak on St. Simon's Island off the mouth of the Altamaha River. The stump stood for many years as "Constitution Oak." The best of live oak timbers were used in the frames, and the construction proceeded with unusual care. It is probable that the delay following the treaty with Algiers served to toughen the oak, and to give it extraordinary hardness.

Colonel George Claghorn was appointed naval constructor, with Mr. Hartly as his assistant, and Samuel Nicholson, one of the new captains, was detailed as inspector for the government. General Henry Jackson was the naval agent through whose hands all payments passed. The ship's keel was laid in the yard of Edmund Hartt; or, as the place was called, "Hartt's Naval Yard," near what is now Constitution Wharf. Edmund Thayer built the gun-carriages at South End, and Isaac

Harris, who put new masts on her during the War of 1812, worked as an apprentice in the mastyard. The anchors were made at Hanover, and the sails in the old Granary Building at the corner of Park and Tremont streets. The Skillings Brothers were employed on carvings for the figurehead and the several ornaments for other parts of the ship. It is an interesting fact that Paul Revere supplied the copper for the hull. He wrote to the Secretary of War offering to furnish the copper and composition bolts, braces, and other parts "as cheap as any one," and he subsequently received \$3820.33 in payment for his contribution toward the building of the Constitution. The copper bolts and spikes were forged by a process known only to him.

In a report on the progress in building the frigate, dated December 23, 1794, Mr. Humphreys makes the following explanation, which shows where he originally got his ideas. "As soon as Congress had agreed to build frigates, it was contemplated to make them the most powerful, and, at the same time, the most useful ships. After the most extensive researches and mature deliberations, their dimensions were fixed and I was directed to prepare the draught; which was accordingly done and approved. Those plans appear to be similar with those adopted by France, in their

great experience in naval architecture ; they having cut down several of their seventy-fours to make heavy frigates ; making them nearly of the dimensions of those for the United States. From the construction of those ships, it is expected the commanders of them will have it in their power to engage or not any ship, as they may think proper ; and no ship under sixty-four, now afloat, but what must submit to them.”

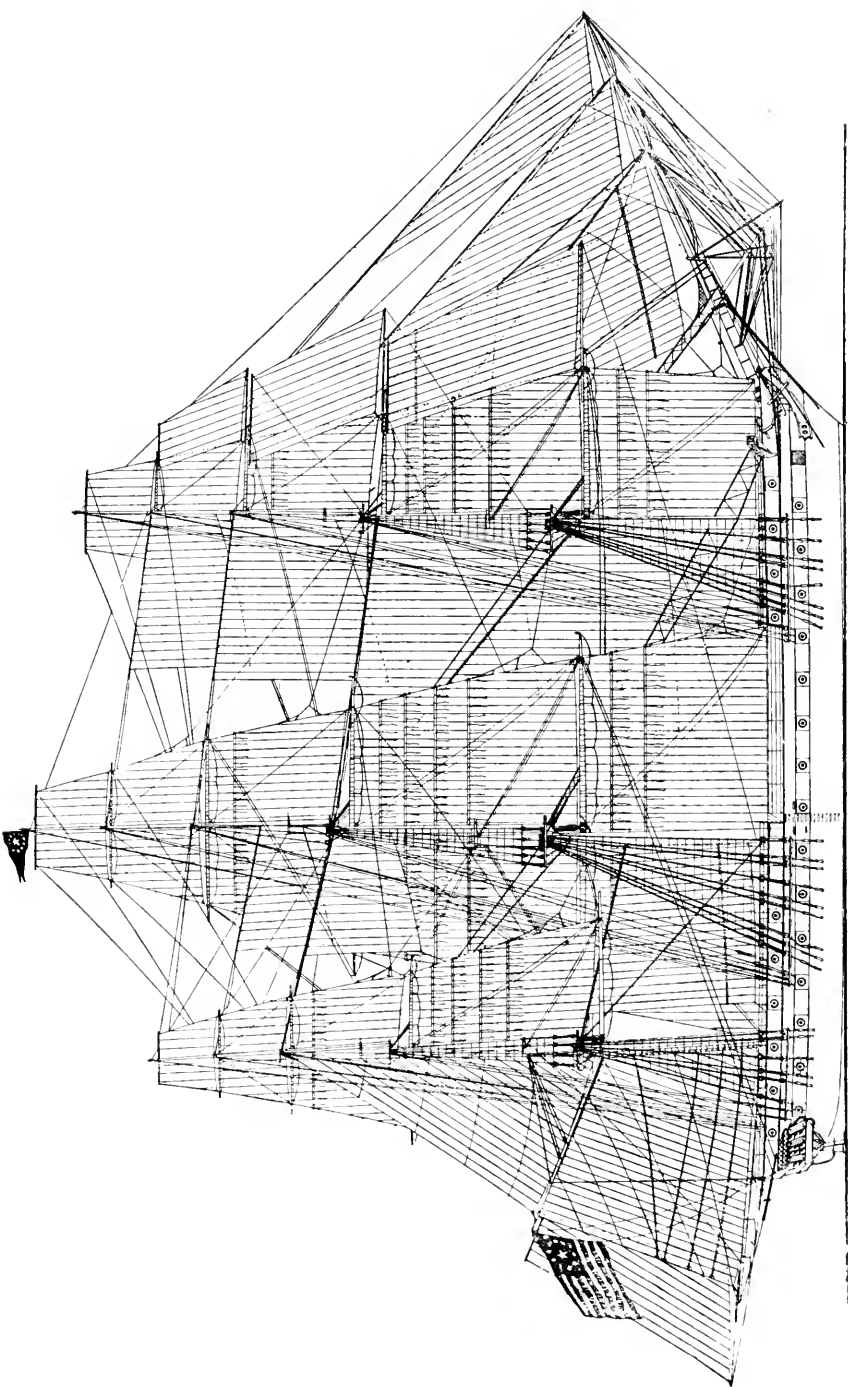
By the end of 1795 she was well along towards completion, but an event occurred to cause a serious delay, and even to threaten her existence ; that was the treaty of peace with Algiers. It had been brought about through the persistent efforts of Colonel Humphreys, with the coöperation of the French Republic. The treaty was signed at Lisbon on November 28, 1795. It cost us in all \$992,463, a large part of which went to the redemption of captives. Peace presents amounted to \$60,000. We further agreed upon an annuity of \$21,600 in naval stores. Two items for the first two years were 1000 barrels of powder and 2000 bomb-shells, enough to have tempted the Algerians to ask for an increase in their annuity. Another item was introduced through our failure to pay promptly. The Dey became very wroth over the unavoidable delay in getting our bills cashed abroad, and the agents, fearing the loss of the

treaty, promised him the additional gift of a fine frigate. This cost us nearly \$100,000. In the course of time the whole miserable business was completed, however, and the work on our new frigates was stopped in accordance with the act of Congress. The treaty with Morocco was renewed at the same time, at an expense of \$25,000 paid down without further tribute. As a sequel to the above, we have the President's recommendation to Congress in 1797, "The Dey of Algiers has manifested a predilection for American-built vessels," and he "will repay the whole expense of building. The expense of navigating them to Algiers may perhaps be compensated by the freight of the stores with which they may be loaded on account of our stipulations by treaty with the Dey."

The whole question of a navy was once more debated in Congress. A report from the Secretary of War showed that the frigates were in various stages of completion, and that all of them could be gotten ready for sea by the end of the year 1796. The sum of \$688,888 had been provided originally, and Congress now directed the unexpended balance of this money to be used for the completion of the three most advanced frigates, the perishable materials and the other three to be sold. At first it was contended that none of these ships should be completed, that we had

no need of a navy, that commerce ought to protect itself. The fundamental reason for maintaining a navy was hardly broached, and Washington struck the keynote of the situation in his message to Congress at the end of 1796. "It is in our own experience that the most sincere neutrality is not sufficient guard against the depredations of nations at war. To secure respect to a neutral flag requires a naval force organized and ready to protect it from insult or aggression." Naturally enough, it was the neutrality question and not the depredations of the corsairs which ultimately forced us into the completion of the frigates and the establishment of a permanent Navy Department.

From the outbreak of the war between Great Britain and France, our merchant-ships had fared badly at the hands of both belligerents. Various decrees and paper blockades were issued by one against the other in the hope of cutting off all supplies regardless of the rights of neutral nations. Our country was the chief sufferer. We were between the millstones. An alliance with one of the belligerents seemed the only way out of the difficulty, and this was exactly what each side was seeking, in order to use our harbors as bases of operation against the West Indies. The French presumed so far as to use them without an alli-



SAIL PLAN OF THE FRIGATE CONSTITUTION





ance, and we were helpless to prevent the grossest violations of neutrality. They even attempted the enlistment of our citizens for service against Great Britain, and when the government objected the French minister appealed to the people against their executive. His recall was requested, and a war of spoliation followed. The depredations of the pirates were as nothing compared with the system pursued, under the guise of belligerent rights, by both England and France. The latter was the worst offender. Hundreds of our ships were captured and run into French or Spanish ports for adjudication. Those not condemned were usually retained until their cargoes became worthless. Many American sailors suffered in the French West Indies no less than the poor captives in Algiers.

The degradation and humiliation of the United States finally passed beyond endurance, and Congress felt obliged to act in defense of our rights. Fortunately, a treaty with England relieved us for the time being of one antagonist, and we were free to turn against France. A number of bills were passed looking to the possibility of war; amongst others, in July, 1797, an additional appropriation for completing three frigates, the *Constitution*, the *United States*, and the *Constellation*. In spite of the extreme tension, however, relations were not

quite to the breaking-point, and Congress was too economical to authorize the actual equipment of these ships for sea. The rupture came with the publication of the diplomatic correspondence with France. The French Directory had refused to receive the three envoys sent over to negotiate, and had practically insulted them. Certain persons appeared as intermediaries between them and the Directory, demanding ample remuneration for their services. Another inflaming cause of the trouble quickly followed in the appearance of a French privateer on the coast in the early part of 1798. She entered the harbor of Charleston and destroyed a British merchant-ship peaceably at anchor; then she went outside and captured two American vessels bound into port. This was so plainly an act of war that Congress immediately appropriated the necessary money to arm, equip, and man the three frigates for operation against the French. One month later, April 30, 1798, the Navy was placed under a separate cabinet officer, and Benjamin Stoddert became the first Secretary of the Navy. The final step towards the formation of the naval service was thus forced upon us by the friends who had helped to gain our independence. They were themselves in worse servitude than the American colonies under George III., and their country was a democracy only in name.

During the summer of 1798 war was practically declared by an act of Congress authorizing the capture of any armed French vessels found within the jurisdictional limits of the United States or elsewhere on the high seas. To the everlasting honor of the nation, the private property of French citizens was respected, and our retaliation was confined solely to those in arms against us.

In the mean time the Constitution had been completed and equipped for sea. She was launched in October, 1797. The date originally fixed for the launching was that of the spring tide on September 20, but she disappointed a large number of spectators by sticking on the ways. The Constellation had been gotten into the water at Baltimore on September 7, and the United States still earlier, July 10, at Philadelphia. Experience with the launching of the latter ship had demonstrated that the ways were too steep. She slid off before the shores were knocked out, and injured her false keel and rudder brace so that she had to be hove down for repairs. The builder of the Constitution, wishing to avoid a repetition of this accident, accordingly gave the ways of his ship less inclination, and got it so small that she did not even move when the props were taken out. The President, the Governor, and other notables had been invited to be present, and the interest in

Boston was so great as to draw crowds of people. The spectacle must have been a mortifying one to Colonel Claghorn. He had sent a communication to the newspapers expressing abundant solicitude for the spectators, particularly women and children. Only a limited number of people were permitted to enter the shipyard ; others were advised not to "approach in crowds too near the margin of the contiguous wharves, as the sudden entrance of so large a body as the frigate will occasion an instantaneous swell of water, the height of which cannot be easily ascertained, and against which, therefore, the discretion of the people ought amply to guard." Pleasure craft were warned off, and those erecting stages for the accommodation of spectators were requested to make them secure, "as the loss of a single citizen would mar the satisfaction and pleasure that the constructor would otherwise enjoy of building and conducting into the ocean a *Powerful Agent* of National Justice, which hope dictates may become the just pride and ornament of the American name." Colonel Claghorn had screws and other mechanical power applied, but in vain. The ship moved down the ways about twenty-seven feet and then stopped. No effort could budge her. The part of the ways which had not previously borne her weight settled, and the case was hopeless. Two days later another

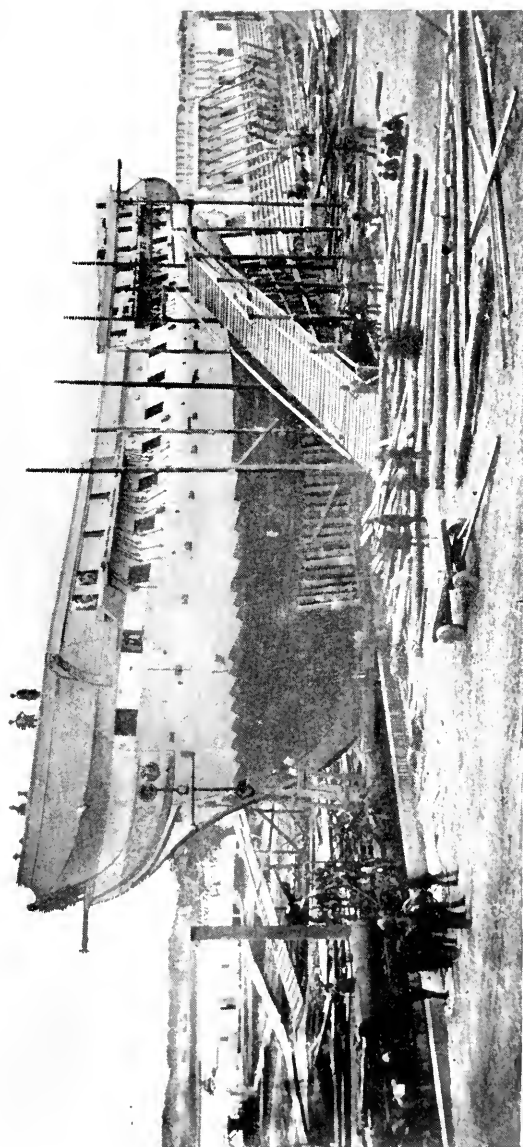
attempt likewise proved futile. She was moved about thirty-one feet further, but the effort was given up for fear of placing her in a very unsafe position if she did not at once slide into the water. Her builder proceeded to increase the inclination of the ways and to give them greater support, so that she might be certain to move off at the next attempt, which was set for the spring tide of October. There is no doubt that the settling of the launching ways strained her so that the keel was out of line.

The newspapers were more or less sympathetic, and various explanations and suggestions were supplied to the public. That the "Centinel" had views on the subject is evidenced by the following, taken from an article written to inculcate the virtue of calmness and philosophy in the people's disappointment: "To indifferent, unthinking people, the disappointment is a disappointment. The Jacobins will crow, and the Chronicle, that speaking trumpet of the devil, will echo the tale of disappointment to the utmost verge of its pestiferous influence."

The Haymarket Theatre was more successful in a stage representation of the launch. A musical piece, called "The Launch," or "Huzza for the Constitution," had been written for the evening of September 20 by Mr. John Hodgkinson. The whole was conceived and prepared in the short

space of forty-eight hours. It was extensively advertised, and seems to have been a great success. One Tyler sang a song in praise of the Constitution and her crew.

The successful launch finally occurred on October 21. Captain James Sever, whose ship was on the stocks at Portsmouth awaiting congressional action, went down to break a bottle of wine over her bow. A newspaper man was present, and gave a very graphic account of the launch before "a numerous and brilliant collection of citizens." They had begun to assemble at daylight on the firing of a gun, which was the signal agreed upon to indicate that all was propitious, and "at fifteen minutes after twelve, at the first stroke at the spur shores, she commenced a movement into the water with such steadiness, majesty and exactness as to fill almost every breast with sensations of joy and delight." The writer closed with the following sentiment: "May the hoary monarch of the element, on whose bosom she now reclines, protect her with his trident; and whenever her departure into the waste of his realm may be necessary, may propitious breezes waft her to the haven of peace, or aid her to hurl the vindictive thunder of national vengeance on the disturbers of our country's repose, or the depredators on the lawful commerce of our citizens."



THE CONSTITUTION READY FOR LAUNCHING





Captain Samuel Nicholson, who was not popular with the constructors and mechanics, desired very much the honor of hoisting the first national flag over the new frigate, but he was forestalled by a workman. He went out of the shipyard for breakfast on the morning of the launch, leaving orders that no flag was to be hoisted, but while he was absent a calker named Samuel Bentley ran up the flag, which had already been bent to the halyards. This was no doubt a piece of mischief deliberately aimed at Captain Nicholson, or perhaps a method of working off some old grudge. The new flag bore fifteen stripes for the total number of states in the Union at that time, instead of thirteen as now.

After launching her, the government did not proceed with diligence to fit her out. The act to complete and equip for sea the three frigates was not passed until March 27, 1798, and the summer arrived before the Constitution got fairly away. The officers ordered to her were as follows: —

*Captain*, Samuel Nicholson.

*First Lieutenant*, Charles Russell.

*Lieutenants*, Benjamin Lee, Richard C. Beale, Isaac Hull.

*Lieutenant of Marines*, Lemuel Clark.

*Surgeon*, William Reed.

The act of Congress directing reprisals against the French soon called into existence a numerous

fleet. Privateers were commissioned, revenue-vessels were ordered to service with the Navy, and several merchant-ships were purchased and armed. Four squadrons were formed to patrol the coast and the West Indies, where French privateers had wrought the greatest havoc upon our merchant shipping. The Constitution, under Captain Samuel Nicholson, was included in the detail for this service. She had dropped down from the inner harbor of Boston to the Roads on July 2, 1798, and she cleared for sea on the 22d. She was not the first of the new navy to get under canvas, as four other ships had preceded her to sea. Her first essay was probably to get the crew shaken down, and to give them some practice at the guns and under sail. She put into Newport on August 21 for orders, and there Captain Nicholson found that he was expected to cruise from Cape Henry to Florida in company with four revenue-cutters, in search of French armed ships. He sailed on August 23, but his ship was transferred in December to the squadron of Commodore John Barry, with cruising-ground along the Windward Islands and rendezvous at Prince Rupert's Bay. The Constitution proved to be too large for the duties assigned to her, as the French sent no heavy armed ships to America, in consequence of the war with England and of the numerous English fleet in the

West Indies. She therefore accomplished little under Captain Nicholson in the destruction of the French privateers. The *Constellation*, a smaller frigate, was more lucky, as she fought the only two frigate actions of the war. None of the American vessels were really serviceable in running down French privateers, until later two fast schooners were fitted up for this purpose. These proved to be more effective than all our ships put together had previously been. In 1799, Captain Nicholson returned to Boston and gave up his command to Commodore Silas Talbot, who, with Isaac Hull as first lieutenant, took the *Constitution* as his flagship. She carried four hundred officers and men at this time.

For several years after the establishment of the Navy Department, the Navy lacked method. The appointment of officers was without system; some had served in the Army, some in merchant-ships, some in the Navy of the Revolution. Almost all of the captains appointed for the six frigates authorized in 1794 had seen service in the Revolutionary Navy. Many of the commissioned lieutenants came from the merchant-service, where they had been commanders. They were good seamen, but often had few qualifications as officers. The midshipmen appointed to the service were usually young men of good families. They seldom had

much education, and the service did not encourage study; but they developed into first-rate seamen, whose skill and pluck have never been exceeded. When the subordinate officers were first appointed to the new ships, they took rank according to the seniority of the commanding officer. The first lieutenant of Captain Barry's ships was senior to all other lieutenants, and the junior lieutenants were senior to all lieutenants of their own grade.

Promotions were made from grade to grade without much rule and without examination for fitness. During the French war they were most irregular, and officers who went to sea as lieutenants sometimes returned home as captains. Acting midshipmen were appointed by the captains of vessels. A warrant from the Navy Department made them permanent officers, but the examinations for advancement to the lieutenant's grade were not instituted until 1819. The service was not homogeneous, and there was little *esprit de corps* until the first midshipmen appointed to the Navy grew up to be commanding officers. Nevertheless, life on board ship seems to have been more social than we find it on our large ships now, and the officers came to know one another better. The smallness of the Navy and the constant meeting of the ships threw them much together. In 1801, after the treaty with France, the list of officers was reduced

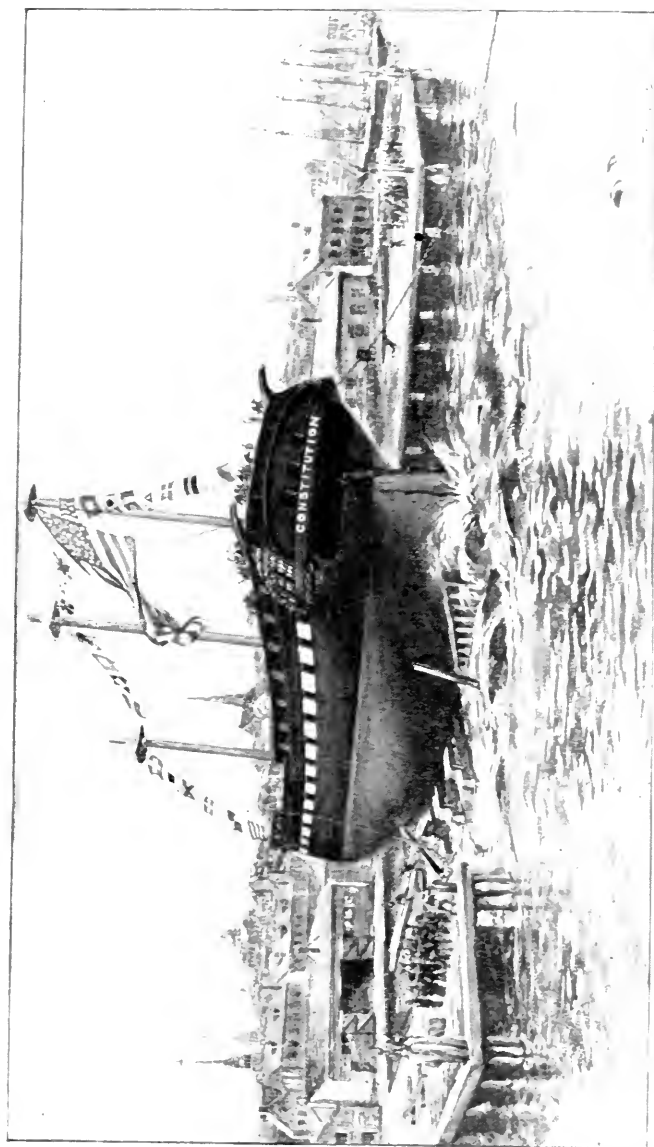
from 506 to 229, probably ridding the service of many undesirables, and leaving a picked corps for the Navy. This may account in some measure for the uniform good behavior of our officers before Tripoli.

There were four grades of officers who succeeded to the command of vessels: Captains, Master Commandants, Lieutenants, and Midshipmen. The senior captain in a squadron, while in command, received the title Commodore, and flew a broad pennant at the mainmast to designate the flagship.

The term of service of seamen was only one year, and ships were often much embarrassed by the necessity of getting back to port for new crews. The war with the Barbary pirates was carried on at such a distance from home that Congress was obliged to extend the period of enlistment to two years, and in 1820 this was further extended to three years. The short enlistment had repeatedly given trouble, and even with the two-year limit the crews were occasionally kept beyond their time, contrary to law, owing to the impossibility of getting them home. In 1807 an incident illustrative of the discontent of the seamen from this cause occurred on the *Constitution* just before she sailed from Gibraltar. Some of the men were nearly two years over time. When all hands were called to get up

anchor, the crew refused to obey unless the ship was to sail for home, where they could obtain their discharges. The captain, sustained by his officers and the marines, succeeded in quelling the insubordination, but none of the men was ever punished.

The Constitution left Boston in August, 1799, to become the flagship on the San Domingo station, and to cruise in the neighborhood of Cayenne and Guadeloupe on the way to Cape François, where Commodore Talbot was to assume the chief command. This cruise brought the ship no particular credit, as she captured only a few insignificant prizes. Two events, however, served to vary the monotony of the quasi-blockade of the islands. As stated before, the ship was very heavily built and carried guns considerably heavier than the corresponding rate in the British Navy. She was much criticised by the English in the West Indies. While cruising to windward of San Domingo, a ship was sighted which turned out to be a British frigate commanded by an acquaintance of Commodore Talbot. The English captain went on board the Constitution to take a look at the craft, and after examining her he expressed great admiration for her, but declared that his own ship could beat her on the wind. As he had come out by way of the Madeiras, where he had purchased some wine, he offered to bet a cask of Madeira against an equiva-



THE LAUNCHING OF THE CONSTITUTION





lent in money if Commodore Talbot would meet him thereabouts some weeks later for a trial of speed. The agreement was made, and the Englishman went into port to refit and clean the bottom. He came out at the appointed time looking, as Jack Tar said, like a new fiddle. The two commanders dined together, and arranged the conditions of the race for the succeeding day. The ships kept near each other during the night, and Isaac Hull, who had charge of all details on the Constitution, made every preparation for the race, which began at dawn upon the firing of a gun. All day long the two ships beat to windward in short tacks, Hull watching for every possible opportunity and advantage. His skill in handling the ship on this occasion gained him a lasting reputation among the sailors, who were kept on deck moving from side to side whenever a better slant of wind could be obtained thereby. When the gun was fired at sunset the Englishman was hull down to leeward. The Constitution accordingly squared away before the wind and joined him after dark. A boat was waiting, and the English captain came on board, like a true sportsman, with his cask of Madeira. It is a pleasant picture to see the two captains meeting over a social glass of wine in celebration of the event. The relations between American and English ships did not lack cordiality

at this period, in spite of the growing irritation over the impressment of our seamen. The Baltimore affair had occurred only the previous year, when five sailors were taken out of the Baltimore sloop-of-war by a British squadron.

The next exploit of the Constitution was full of promise for the future, although not very creditable to the judgment of the commanding officer. Having heard that the Sandwich, a French letter of marque, was in the Spanish harbor of Porto Plata, on the north side of San Domingo, loading with coffee, he determined to cut her out. Isaac Hull was directed on the 10th of May, 1800, to take a detachment of sailors and marines from the Constitution for this duty, and Commodore Talbot gave him orders to bring the Sandwich out if practicable. The work was admirably done in broad daylight, as will be seen by Commodore Talbot's own report to the Secretary of the Navy :

I have now to acquaint you, Sir, that I have for some time been meditating an enterprise against a French armed ship lying at Port Platte, protected by her own guns and a fort of three heavy cannon. It was my first intention to have gone in with the Constitution, and to have silenced the fort and ship, which has all her guns on one side, to coöperate with the fort in defending against any hostile force ; but after the best information I could gain, I found it to be somewhat dangerous to

approach the entrance of the harbor, with a ship of the draft of water of the Constitution.

Having detained the sloop Sally, which had left Port Platte but a few days before, and was to have returned there previous to her sailing for the United States, I conceived that this sloop would be a suitable vessel for a disguise. I therefore manned her at sea from the Constitution, with about ninety brave seamen and marines, the latter to be commanded by Captain Carmick and Lieutenant Amory, when on shore; but the entire command I gave to Mr. Isaac Hull, my first lieutenant, who entered the harbor of Port Platte yesterday, in open day, with his men in the hold of the sloop, except five or six to work her in. They ran alongside of the ship, and boarded her sword in hand, without the loss of a man, killed or wounded. At the moment the ship was boarded, agreeably to my plan, Captain Carmick and Lieutenant Amory landed with the marines, up to their necks in water, and spiked all the cannon in the fort, before the commanding officer had time to recollect and prepare himself for defence.

Perhaps no enterprise of the same moment was ever better executed; and I feel myself under great obligations to Lieutenant Hull, Captain Carmick, and Lieutenant Amory, for their avidity in undertaking the scheme I had planned, and for the handsome manner and great address with which they performed this daring venture.

The ship, I understand, mounts four sixes and two nines; she was formerly the British packet Sandwich,

and from the boasting publications at the cape, and the declaration of the officers, she is one of the fastest sailors that swims. She ran three or four years (if I forget not), as a privateer out of France, and with greater success than any other that ever sailed out of their ports. She is a beautiful copper bottomed ship; her cargo consists principally of sugar and coffee.

I am, &c.,                      SILAS TALBOT.

After the capture, the ship, which was stripped down to her lower masts, had to be rigged before they could move her; but nothing daunted the American sailors, and she sailed out at sunset. Not a man was injured. Although no expedition was ever better planned and carried out, it cost the crew dear in the end. The capture was wholly illegal, as the United States had no quarrel with Spain and was not even by declaration at war with France. The government not only returned the Sandwich, but also held back all the prize money earned by the Constitution during the cruise to pay damages. There may have been some justification in Commodore Talbot's mind for the capture. The Spaniards did not object to the use of their ports for the benefit of French armed vessels, and it is probable that they violated their neutrality repeatedly. Still, this did not justify an American officer in an illegal act. Upon the return of the Constitution to Boston in August, 1800, the

Secretary of the Navy wrote a very glowing tribute to Commodore Talbot for his meritorious services in "protecting with effect a great proportion of our commerce, in laying the foundation of a permanent trade with San Domingo, and in causing the American character to be respected." He went back to his old station on the *Constitution* in November and served until March, 1801, when the treaty with France removed all cause of friction, and the ships were recalled.

By Act of Congress approved March 3, 1801, the Navy was reduced to a peace footing, and only those ships built expressly for the service were retained. The country had not yet reached the point of dealing adequately with the Algerian and Tripolitan pirates, and there was very little use for the heavy frigates. The crew of the *Constitution* was accordingly paid off, and the ship was dismantled at the Boston Navy Yard, where she lay from March, 1801, to August, 1803. On the 14th of that month she sailed for the Mediterranean under the command of Edward Preble, to serve as flagship on the blockade which broke the power of the corsair. She carried out as passengers Colonel Tobias Lear, Consul General of the United States to the Barbary States, and his wife.

The officers attached to her at this time were : —

*Captain*, Edward Preble.

*Lieutenants*, Thomas Robinson, William C. Jenks, Joseph Tarbell, and Samuel Elbert.

*Sailing-master*, Nathaniel Haraden.

*Midshipmen*, Daniel S. Dexter, John M. Haswell, Ralph Izard, Charles Morris, John Rowe, Alexander Laws, John Davis, William Burrows, David Deacon, Heathcote J. Reed, James Nicholson, Leonard Hunnewell, Thomas Baldwin, Francis C. Hall, and John Thompson.

Lieutenant Jenks left her at Gibraltar, and Lieutenant John H. Dent and Charles Gordon joined her. Midshipman Baldwin resigned, and the following midshipmen were transferred to her : —

Henry Wadsworth, Lewis Alexis, Christopher Gadsen, Joseph Israel, Charles G. Ridgely, Richard Carey, Robert Henley, Thomas MacDonough, and William Lewis.

## CHAPTER V

### WAR WITH TRIPOLI — EDWARD PREBLE

THE chain of events which led up to this voyage forms an interesting and instructive lesson on the impotency of our foreign relations one hundred years ago. The treaty with Algiers had awakened the cupidity of Tripoli, and the Dey complained to our consul that he was not receiving the attentions paid to Algiers and Tunis. He wanted a frigate like that presented to the former. This frigate had sailed from Portsmouth in 1798, under the following circumstances, as noticed in one of the journals : —

#### CRESCENT FRIGATE

PORTSMOUTH Jan. 20th.

On Thursday morning about sunrise, a gun was discharged from the Crescent frigate as a signal for getting under way ; and at 10, A. M., she cleared the harbor, with a fine leading breeze. May they arrive in safety at the place of their destination, and present to the Dey of Algiers, one of the finest specimens of elegant naval architecture which was ever borne on the Piscataqua's waters.

Blow all ye winds that fill the prosperous sail,  
And hushed in peace be every adverse gale.

The Crescent is a present from the United States to the Dey, as compensation for delay in not fulfilling our treaty stipulations in proper time.

Richard O'Brien, Esq., who was ten years a prisoner at Algiers, took passage in the above frigate, and is to reside at Algiers as Consul General of the United States to all the Barbary States.

The Crescent has many valuable presents on board for the Dey, and when she sailed was supposed to be worth at least three hundred thousand dollars.

Twenty-six barrels of dollars constituted a part of her cargo.

It is worthy of remark, that the captain, chief of the officers, and many of the privates of the Crescent frigate, have been prisoners at Algiers.

There was a certain delicacy in manning the ship with former captives of the Dey which could not fail to propitiate and please him. He grew to regard himself as having a certain proprietary interest in all our ships, and two years later, when Captain Bainbridge arrived in the George Washington with the tribute, he ordered her to Constantinople with an ambassador and presents to the Sultan. Bainbridge yielded to this demand, under the advice of our consul, for the sake of American commerce in the Mediterranean. We had upwards of 200 sail entirely unprotected within reach of the



Dey and his corsairs. The George Washington returned to Algiers with a firman from the Sultan which frightened the Dey, and Bainbridge made use of his temporary panic to secure the liberation of the French Consul and sixty of his countrymen.

A letter to the President of the United States from the Dey of Tripoli in May, 1800, reads as follows :

“After having cultivated the branches of our good will, and paved the way for a good understanding and perfect friendship, which we wish may continue forever, we make known, that the object and contents of this our present letter is, that whereas, your consul, who resides at our court in your service, has communicated to us, in your name, that you have written to him that you regarded the regency of Tripoli in the same point of view as the other regencies of Barbary, and to be upon the same footing of friendship and importance. In order further to strengthen the bonds of a good understanding, blessed be God, may he complete and grant to you his high protection. But our sincere friend, we could wish that these your expressions were followed by deeds, and not by empty words. You will therefore endeavor to satisfy us by a good manner of proceeding. We, on our part, will correspond with you with equal friendship, as well in words as deeds. But if only flattering words are meant without performance, every one will act as he finds convenient: we beg a speedy answer, without neglect of time, as a delay on your part cannot but be prejudicial to your interests.”

The President was negligent about soothing the injured feelings of this Oriental gentleman, and accordingly, May 14, 1801, he ordered the American flagstaff cut down in token of a declaration of war, and told the American consul he could go or stay. The Dey of Tunis was also displeased, and demanded various gifts, principally forty cannon, all to be 24-pounders, and ten thousand stands of arms. He wanted them at once. Released from the difficulty with France, the United States was able to send a squadron to the Mediterranean in the summer of 1801. Commodore Richard Dale was ordered over with four ships simply to observe the ports of the Barbary States. He was directed not to go beyond the line of defense. In consequence, a Tripolitan armed vessel captured by the *Enterprise* was released after being dismantled and stripped of her guns. Commodore Dale succeeded in protecting American ships by convoy and by a display of force in the North African ports, but his orders were too limited for effective work and his ships were not suitable; besides, the time of his men ran out, and he was relieved early in 1802 by Commodore Richard V. Morris with a squadron of six ships. This squadron accomplished practically nothing, for which Commodore Morris was suspended by the President in June, 1803. He was directed to turn over his command to Captain Rodgers, pending the arrival of Commodore Preble.

The Constitution reached Gibraltar on September 12, 1803, just twenty-nine days from Boston, and met there three ships of Morris's squadron, — the Adams, on the eve of returning to the United States with Morris, and the New York and John Adams under John Rodgers, who was also ordered to bring his ships home. The Philadelphia had arrived out in August, the Nautilus in July, and several other ships joined later. By November 1, Preble had under his command the following vessels : —

Constitution	44 guns	Edward Preble
Philadelphia	44 “	William Bainbridge
Argus	16 “	Isaac Hull
Siren	16 “	Charles Stewart
Vixen	14 “	John Smith
Nautilus	12 “	Richard Somers
Enterprise	12 “	Stephen Decatur

The government, having discovered by experience with two different squadrons that frigates were too heavy for the service before Tripoli and Tunis, had authorized the construction of four small vessels early in 1803. The work on them was pushed as rapidly as possible, and they were sent to the Mediterranean, one at a time, as they were completed. Of these, the Argus and Siren were brigs, the Vixen and Nautilus schooners. The Enterprise was a schooner left on the station

from Commodore Morris's command. They were intended for inshore work, where light draught was a necessity. The character of the north coast of Africa rendered navigation for large ships very dangerous when pursuing the smaller piratical craft, which could run for refuge into any of the shallow bays and inlets. The Constitution and the Philadelphia were really too heavy for blockade duty on the south shore of the Mediterranean, and too light for the bombardment of fortifications, so that their places seemed as convoys; but the United States possessed nothing better. The line-of-battle-ships were not built until afterwards. Commodore Preble's little fleet has been called the nursery of the Navy, or the training-school of the War of 1812, and its commander had so great an influence in shaping the characters of a number of men who were destined to mould the chaotic mass of ships and men then called the Navy into a well-disciplined service, that he deserves more than a passing mention. The importance of having a clear head at the beginning of things cannot be overestimated. We owe to Preble more than the release from the pirates of North Africa. The spectacular always has a great attraction, and in the heroic deeds of our young sailors and the glitter of arms as they fought hand to hand with the corsairs, we must not lose sight of the long weeks of

preparation and the wise guidance of impetuous seamen to a single end.

Edward Preble was born at Portland, Maine, in 1761, and obtained his early education at the Dummer Academy. His father designed him for a professional career, but at sixteen the boy ran away from the farm on which they lived, and enlisted on a privateer commanded by William French. In 1779 his father obtained a midshipman's warrant for him in the Massachusetts State Marine, and he went to sea on the *Protector*, a 26-gun ship commanded by J. F. Williams. He was in two actions with the British, and was taken prisoner and sent to New York, where he would have experienced much privation but for a friend of his father's who secured his release. He promptly joined the *Winthrop*, as first lieutenant, and distinguished himself greatly in a successful cutting-out expedition under the guns of Castine.

He subsequently spent fifteen years in the merchant-service and saw much of the world. During the preparation for war with France he received a commission as lieutenant in the Navy, in April, 1798. Although ordered to the *Constitution*, he succeeded in obtaining command of the *Pickering*, a revenue cutter. Promoted to captain in June, 1799, he was placed in command of the *Essex*, and sailed to the East Indies to convoy home a fleet of

merchantmen. In January, 1802, he was ordered to command the frigate *Adams*, but was released from that duty on account of sickness ; and in May, 1803, he was detailed to get the *Constitution* ready for service in the Mediterranean. He was one of the best of our early seamen, and as an officer earned the good will of all who served under him. Notwithstanding this, his subordinates disliked him at first, and time was required to discover beneath a violent temper kindness and justice. His discipline was rigid, but applications to serve under him were numerous. The great responsibility of the Mediterranean station, with insufficient means to carry out the designs of Congress, demanded an organizing ability altogether different from that displayed in the great single actions of the Navy. It was undertaken and supported without flinching, although he was gradually sinking under bodily infirmity. He took command of the squadron at the age of forty-two and died four years later.

The following incident of the voyage out is related by Morris, who was then serving as a midshipman on board. It is quite evident that Preble began the cruise with considerable friction :—

“ We had nothing of interest on the passage until near the entrance of the Straits of Gibraltar, when, upon a very dark evening, with very light winds, we suddenly

found ourselves near a vessel which was evidently a ship of war. The crew were immediately but silently brought to quarters, after which the Commodore gave the usual hail, 'What ship is that?' The same question was returned; in reply to which the name of our ship was given, and the question repeated. Again the question was returned instead of an answer, and again our ship's name given and the question repeated, without other reply than its repetition. The Commodore's patience seemed now exhausted, and, taking the trumpet, he hailed and said, 'I am now going to hail you for the last time. If a proper answer is not returned, I will fire a shot into you.' A prompt answer came back, 'If you fire a shot, I will return a broadside.' Preble then hailed, 'What ship is that?' The reply was, 'This is His Britannic Majesty's ship *Donnegal*, eighty-four guns, Sir Richard Strahan, an English Commodore. Send your boat on board.' Under the excitement of the moment, Preble leaped on the hammocks and returned for answer, 'This is the United States ship *Constitution*, forty-four guns, Edward Preble, an American Commodore, who will be damned before he sends his boat on board of any vessel.' And, turning to the crew, he said, 'Blow your matches, boys.' The conversation here ceased, and soon after a boat was heard coming from the stranger, and arrived with a lieutenant from the frigate *Maidstone*. The object of this officer was to apologize for the apparent rudeness which had been displayed. He stated that our ship had not been seen until we had hailed them; that it was, of course,

very important to gain time to bring their men to quarters, especially as it was apparent we were not English, and they had no expectation of meeting an American ship of war there; and that this object had induced their delay and misrepresentation in giving the ship's name. The excuses were deemed satisfactory, and the ships separated. This was the first occasion that had offered to show us what we might expect from our commander, and the spirit and decision which he displayed were hailed with pleasure by all, and at once mitigated greatly the unfriendly feelings which the exhibitions of his temper had produced."

Although the squadron formed only a fraction of our available sea force, a large majority of the officers who distinguished themselves in the War of 1812 served under Preble before Tripoli. Decatur, Hull, Stewart, Biddle, Macdonough, Lawrence, Warrington, Chauncey, and Burrows, were all men much above the average. Bainbridge, Jones, and Porter were prisoners in Tripoli, and Perry had gone home in the *Adams* just after the new squadron came out. All of the commanding officers were young. Not one had reached the age of thirty when Preble first met them for a conference in his cabin. He felt that the government had not dealt fairly with him in sending out a lot of boys. In fact, he expressed his dissatisfaction to Mr. Lear, who was on board. When afterwards





EDWARD PREBLE



reminded that he had called them boys, he said, "Yes, but they are good boys." He also told Mr. Lear that no commander was ever blessed with better officers. It was perhaps the intimate personal association with Preble and with one another in a very trying and difficult service that went far to form their characters and to fit them for the more independent commands which came afterwards. We probably owe more than the conquest of Tripoli to this association. Personal acquaintance and sympathy have much to do with success in any service, and Commodore Preble seems to have had the faculty of inspiring young men to do their best without jealousies. There was not a court-martial or duel during his entire command.

The means placed in Preble's hands were entirely inadequate, and the Secretary said as much. The Department left him to create his own force as best he could, and this he accomplished partly by capture and partly by purchase of gunboats and bomb-vessels. The base of supplies was so remote and the Navy Department so poorly organized to meet the constant needs of the squadron that Preble often had great difficulty in obtaining provisions. Everything had to go out from home, on account of the great scarcity in the Mediterranean, where the English and French ships were struggling for supremacy. The surgeon reported that

many of the men were on the sick list because they were insufficiently clad, and much of the food which reached them from home was spoiled. Add to this the fact that the United States had no recognized position abroad, no reciprocity treaties with foreign countries, and that drafts were difficult to negotiate, and we get some idea of the obstacles which confronted our ships four thousand miles away from their own ports with very irregular communication. The wonder is that they accomplished anything. All of them were short of men, and contained a great many foreigners in their complements.

Some light is thrown on the impressment controversy with England by the enlistment of the Constitution's crew. Preble had had great difficulty in obtaining seamen, as the government would not pay as much wages as could be earned in the merchant-service, and the men whom he did engage were principally foreigners. He wrote to the Department, "I do not believe that I have twenty native American sailors on board." The Philadelphia was about as badly off, and we find Bainbridge after her capture by the Tripolitans suggesting to Preble the propriety of allowing Nelson to claim the English subjects among her crew, three fourths of them being of that description, in order to release them from captivity and

slavery. There were frequent desertions to British ships of war, so that Preble felt himself obliged to remove his provisions and stores from their ports, and to make Syracuse the port of deposit.

In these days of steam the younger generation cannot realize the tremendous task of holding upon the blockade both winter and summer a lot of vessels dependent entirely upon their sails for propulsion. And Tripoli was particularly unfavorable for such work. The prevailing wind during the winter months was from the north and east, with an occasional hurricane from that direction, making it exceedingly dangerous for a ship to be caught in the angle formed by the shores of Tunis and Tripoli. The first indications of a gale forced the ships to claw off and to make easting if possible. An extract from the Constitution's log shows how the officers regarded the coast. "The weather to the northward has every appearance of a strong breeze from that quarter. A heavy gale from the N. E. or the N. N. E. would make our situation very disagreeable. It would expose us to an enemy's coast, the angular position of which to the Northward and Westward makes it necessary to avoid that part by standing to the Eastward. We could only lay the coast along and of course afford no drift or leeway. The horrors of shipwreck added to irretrievable slavery makes the

coast very dangerous in the winter. If any cruises on this coast in a heavy gale on shore, they have no other safety but their sails, and if they once lose them, they lose all hopes of a retreat."

Before going into the Mediterranean, Preble found it advisable to secure the Straits for the free entrance of American ships. There was good ground for believing that the Emperor of Morocco had broken the treaty signed by his father, as the *Philadelphia* on her way out had run across the Moorish cruiser *Mirboka* in possession of an American merchantman. Bainbridge had taken them into Gibraltar, where another cruiser, the *Meshouda*, was held by the squadron. She had been captured while trying to run the blockade of Tripoli, but she was claimed by the Moors. Preble determined to use his squadron and these two prizes, the former by way of intimidation and the latter for the purpose of exchange, in restoring the ancient amity between our country and Morocco. The decision was wise. Considering the fact that all of his supplies had to pass through the same way, he could not afford to leave an enemy in his rear, and that too in the very neck of the bottle which he was entering.

He accordingly sent the *Philadelphia* and the *Vixen* to establish once more the blockade of Tripoli, and he then crossed over to Tangier in the

Constitution, accompanied by the Nautilus and the John Adams, the last named under Rodgers, who had generously waived his seniority over Preble for the good of the cause. The Constitution was kept cruising between Gibraltar and Tangier and off the coast of Morocco awaiting the arrival of the Emperor. Her movements were often delayed by unfavorable winds, as a head wind either in or out of the Strait rendered navigation difficult. But the time came at last when Preble, backed by a strong show of force, including the John Adams and the New York, was able to influence the war-like ruler into good behavior. A new treaty was signed, by the terms of which mutual concessions were made, but no tribute was paid.

The two armed Moorish vessels in our possession were returned, and a United States merchantship detained in a port of Morocco was released. Good care was taken to send a ship to see to the release, and a sharp eye was kept on the Moors for some time afterwards. They have never given us any trouble since. It is interesting to note, from an entry in the Constitution's log-book, Preble's readiness to accept the alternative of peace without asking the President for a declaration of war. "October 5. At anchor in Tangier Bay. Men sleeping at the guns all night before. In the forenoon saw fully ten thousand Moorish inhabitants marching in from different directions."

All of the ships were prudently kept ready for action until the Emperor's disposition was ascertained, and Preble wrote the following letter to the American consul : —

U. S. S. CONSTITUTION, TANGIER BAY,  
Six P. M. Oct. 4, 1803.

I am honored with your communication of this evening. I shall not send a boat on shore until I have the Emperor's permission, but shall wait your communication by a shore boat.

As you think it will gratify his Imperial Majesty, I shall salute him and dress ship ; and if he is not disposed to be pacific, *I will salute him again.*

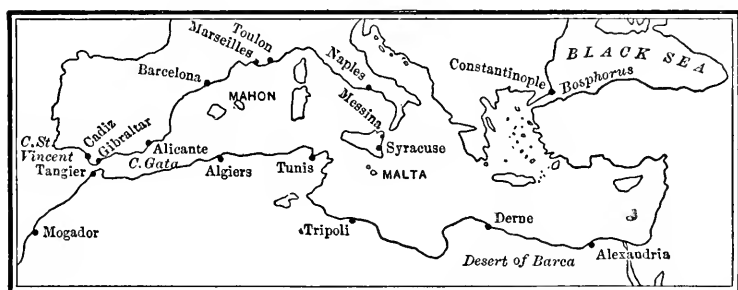
Respectfully, E. PREBLE.

On October 17, the ship was back at Gibraltar, the last remnants of the preceding squadron had departed for home, and Preble was alone to work out his mission. He sailed for Cadiz on the 22d to get a new anchor and a stream cable, and to fill his casks with fresh water. On the return, he stopped at Tangier Bay to communicate with the consul and “to let the Moors know that he had not forgotten them,” and reached Gibraltar Bay on November 6, where he found the *Argus*.

On the 20th, he declared Tripoli in a state of blockade, and sent word to our ministers and to several of our consuls in Europe that he had done so. Only one more piece of business remained



before he could proceed to Syracuse, which had been selected for headquarters. He sailed on November 13 with the *Nautilus* and *Argus* to land Colonel Lear at Algiers, and having accomplished this one week later, he was free to sail for the rendezvous on the 22d. On the 24th, he spoke the British ship *Amazon* off the coast of Sardinia, and heard of the loss of the frigate *Philadelphia*, and on the 28th, he finally came to anchor in the

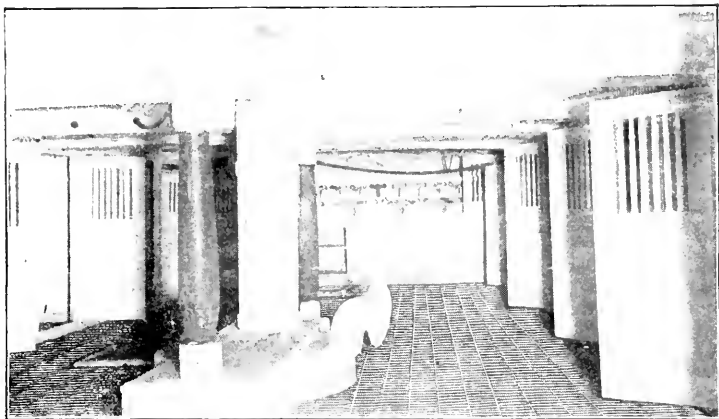


MEDITERRANEAN PORTS

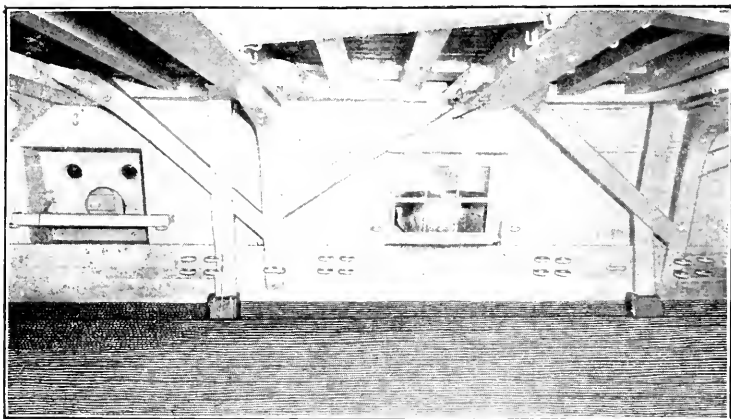
harbor of Syracuse, having touched at Malta for confirmation of the bad news.

It seemed as if fate were against the expedition. The loss of the *Philadelphia* deprived the squadron of fully one third of its strength. One of the smaller vessels was needed, for a few months at least, to guard the Straits; and Preble thus had left the *Constitution* and four small vessels. To add to his perplexity the winter season had come on, and he was forced by the dangerous nature of

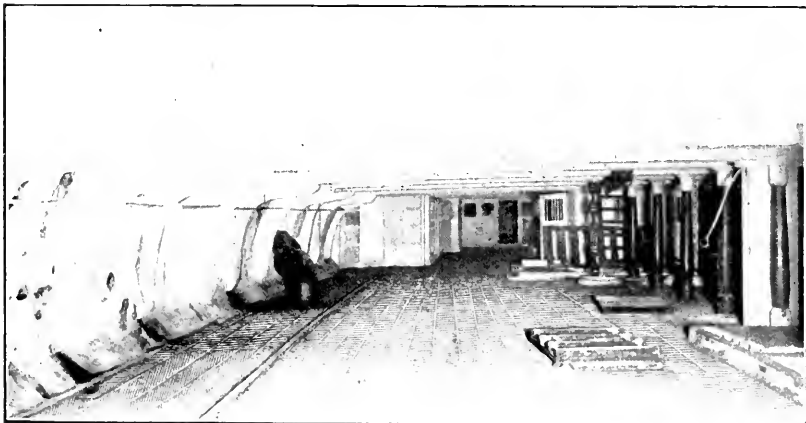
the coast to postpone active operations against the city six or seven months. In the mean time he made every effort to maintain the hazardous blockade. The disaster to the Philadelphia occurred on October 31, two weeks before Preble left Gibraltar for the East. Soon after Bainbridge arrived off the harbor of Tripoli, he sent the Vixen in search of a cruiser that had come out a few days before. He was thus left to maintain the blockade alone with a ship entirely too deep for inshore work. A gale of wind swept him to the eastward, and, while returning before a fair breeze, he sighted a large xebec standing into Tripoli. With his usual impetuosity, he chased her close inshore within three miles of the town, but she escaped. In hauling off, the Philadelphia ran on a shelving rock, and her bow was lifted from three to four feet by the force of the blow. The position of this rock was not known to the Americans. The yards were braced aback, and the guns were run aft where the water was deeper, in the attempt to get her off. Nine of the enemy's gunboats came out at once, and Captain Bainbridge hastened to have the forward guns and the anchors thrown overboard, but it was in vain; the case was absolutely hopeless. The gunboats had obtained a position from which they could fire upon the ship without a return fire, and there was nothing for the Americans to do but to



*Ward-Room*



*Gun-Deck*



*Berth-Deck*

INTERIOR OF THE CONSTITUTION



surrender. They made one last effort by pumping out the fresh water, throwing overboard all heavy articles and cutting away the foremast. Still the ship stuck hard and fast on the reef. Captain Bainbridge then flooded the magazines, scuttled the ship, and hauled down the flag to save the lives of his crew. Thus 22 officers and 293 men became prisoners of the Dey, and the Philadelphia was added to his possessions a few days later. A north-west gale piled up the sea around the rock, and the Tripolitans were able to get her into a position from which she was easily floated. They raised the guns and proceeded to fit her for service. The loss of this ship had a baneful effect upon the war, as it gave the Dey something to trade upon and put into his possession a number of American sailors for ransom. Preble might well feel distressed and embarrassed at the very outset of his mission. He never showed any lack of confidence in Bainbridge, however, and throughout his captivity managed to send him a number of generous and sympathetic letters. One of these letters indicates the channel of communication as well as the good will he bore him.

MALTA, Jan. 23, 1804.

You will receive a present supply of money from here through the British consul, B. McDonough, Esq., forwarded by Mr. Higgins.

Any letter you will direct to the care of William Higgins, Esq., whom I have appointed Agent at this post for the squadron of the United States in these seas, and I am confident that he will pay you every attention. The clothing and other stores which ought to have been with you six weeks since, were detained by Mr. Pulis; and for what reason, I know not. Your drafts on Mr. Higgins will be duly honored. Keep up your spirits, and despair not; recollect there's a sweet little cherub that sits up aloft.

May the Almighty Disposer of all events aid me in my plans and operations for the good of my country, and may you be liberated by them is the hope of

Your friend who esteems you,

EDWARD PREBLE.

The chart of the harbor will disclose a number of shallows in the approaches and a long line of reefs running to the eastward. The anchorage lies behind this barrier, well protected against westerly and northerly gales. There are several entrances, but they demand a good knowledge of the surrounding rocks to be used by vessels of any draught. Once inside the line of shallows, it would have been difficult for a large ship to get out even with a chart, and the only valid criticism against Bainbridge was that he let his ship be drawn too far in. There was no survey at that time, and he had no means of knowing the coast.

The sounding lead was kept going, and the Philadelphia was in six or seven fathoms of water just before she struck. Captain Bainbridge has always been held blameless for an accident that was bitterly expiated in eighteen months' captivity under horrible conditions.

As an example of the difficulties in the maintenance of communication between the flagship and the other members of the squadron, the voyage of the Vixen to the westward may be cited. She was at Malta when news of the Philadelphia's loss reached her. Lieutenant Smith immediately sailed for Gibraltar to notify Commodore Preble, but in the stress of heavy weather probably passed him not far from Algiers. After twenty days of contrary winds, he had made good only one third of the distance to the Straits and found himself short of provisions. He therefore returned to Malta, which he must have reached just after the Constitution had left, and, having taken on board provisions, sailed for Syracuse. The distance was only about one hundred miles to the northwest, and yet the Vixen was thirty days getting to her anchorage. There is a constant note of delay in the Constitution's log. She, or one of the other vessels of the squadron, was repeatedly detained for days inside of the harbor, when she wanted to get out, or outside when she wanted to get in.

Every movement depended on the wind. There was no limit to the patience and perseverance demanded of the officers, and much was of necessity left to the discretion of the various commanding officers when separated from the commander-in-chief.



## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION OF THE WAR WITH TRIPOLI — SERVICE IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

It is not the purpose of this volume to give a complete account of the war with Tripoli. It was carried on mainly by the smaller ships, but every expedition was planned on the *Constitution*, which was kept incessantly active. Preble's plan was evidently to seal up the port of Tripoli to commerce by keeping one or more ships constantly on the blockade; and, when he got everything in readiness, to make an assault on the walls and fortifications. The Dey had accumulated nineteen gunboats, and had fortified the town and outlying regions. He employed the crew of the *Philadelphia* at the latter work. On December 17, the *Constitution* sailed with the *Vixen* and the *Enterprise* on a cruise, evidently of observation, after having waited four days to get out of the harbor; they were finally towed out by the squadron's boats. They stopped at Malta for dispatches, and then headed for the coast of Tripoli. A Tripolitan

ketch was sighted on the 23d, and, by displaying English colors in the fleet, the *Enterprise* was able to capture her. She proved to be the *Mastico*, carrying blacks as a present to the Sultan of Turkey. Several officers of distinction on board were taken to the Commodore's table. On the 24th they arrived off Tripoli, but a gale from the northeast blew up, and, after having beaten about for four days in the triangle formed by Tripoli, Tunis, and Malta, the *Constitution* took the ketch in tow and sailed for Syracuse. She remained in port from January 1 to March 1, 1804, but Preble made a voyage to Malta in the *Vixen* during the interval. The smaller ships were constantly coming and going.

On the night of February 16, the *Philadelphia* was burned by American sailors under Decatur. This expedition had been planned early in December by Preble. Later he received letters from Bainbridge suggesting that the ship should be destroyed, and giving him information about her position and the surrounding batteries. This correspondence was carried on by the aid of the Danish consul, Mr. Nicholas Nissen. The secret part of it is said to have been written in sympathetic ink. Decatur had volunteered to go in with his own ship, the *Enterprise*, and capture her by boarding; and later Stewart had offered to cut her

out with the *Siren*. Preble substituted the ketch, a duty for which she was adapted on account of her general appearance. She was fitted out for the purpose at Syracuse, and rechristened *Intrepid*. The destination of this vessel must have been kept a secret in the fleet until the last moment; for as late as February 1, the *Constitution's* log contains an entry stating that the prize was being fitted for some expedition under Decatur. She sailed on February 2, in company with the *Siren*. Her crew was made up of volunteers from the *Enterprise*, Decatur's ship, and five midshipmen from the *Constitution*. There were eleven officers, among them Decatur, Lawrence, Joseph Bainbridge, Morris and Macdonough, a Maltese pilot, and sixty-two enlisted men. The pilot, Salvadore Catalano, afterwards became a sailing master in the United States Navy. Commodore Morris says in his journal that a boat with six men joined them from the *Siren* before going in. This would make a crew of eighty men in all.

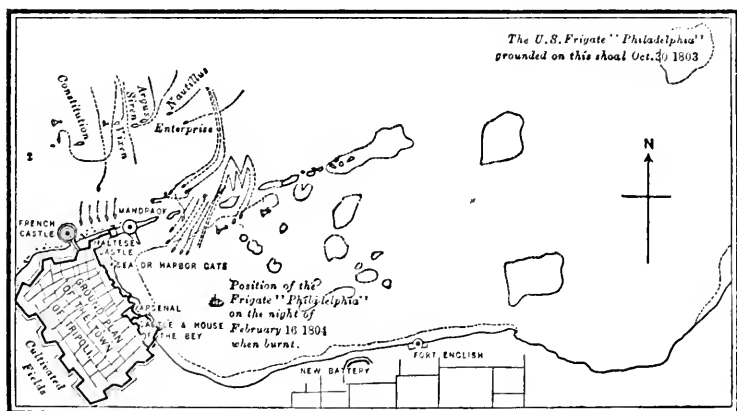
In this wretched boat, rigged for sixteen oars, and hardly larger than a fair-sized sailing yacht, seventy-four men reached the coast four days later, convoyed by the brig *Siren* under the command of Charles Stewart, and headed for a passage through the rocks to the inner harbor.

She arrived in sight of the town on the afternoon

of the 6th, and anchored off the entrance at night-fall; but a sudden and violent gale swept her to the eastward, and both she and the Siren had to ride out at sea a terrific storm that lasted six days and nights. At times it was feared that the Intrepid could not last through it; but the seventh day found both vessels near the harbor, once more in favorable weather. The Siren, well disguised, did not approach within sight of the coast during daylight, but the Intrepid sailed calmly for the port as if on an ordinary trading voyage. Several of the boats of the Siren were to join her before going in, but Decatur did not wait for them. The uncertainty of the weather forbade delay. He had made all his arrangements to burn the Philadelphia, and then to escape by towing or rowing the Intrepid out of the harbor under cover of the darkness. Every man had his allotted station and task. As soon as the frigate was taken each was to rush with combustibles to a specified place. The greater part of the crew lay hidden behind the bulwarks, as the ketch drifted slowly down in the half darkness of a new moon to the anchorage.

It is well to stop a moment to consider what one mistake would have cost them. The Philadelphia had a full crew, all her guns were loaded, and she was surrounded by Tripolitan gunboats. Not one of the Americans could have escaped if the slightest

suspicion had been aroused before boarding; yet they went boldly on to within a few feet of the Philadelphia, and, when hailed, the Maltese pilot replied that the ketch was a Maltese trader that had lost her anchors in the storm. They asked for a line and permission to tie up to the ship over night. They lay only forty yards from the port battery, and in the range of every gun at this



TRIPOLI HARBOR

time. While Decatur coolly sent a boat to make fast to the fore chains of the Philadelphia, some of the latter's crew came out with a line from the stern, and assisted them in making fast there also. A few minutes of cautious pulling on the bow line, then a wild cry of "Americanos!" from a Turk who was looking over the bulwarks, and the Americans were clambering up the side in a scramble

to see who would be first on the frigate's deck. In a mad panic the crew were either cut down or driven into the sea. Everything worked exactly as Decatur had planned it, and within twenty minutes the ship was ablaze. His men were fairly driven back into their boat by the flames.

The return was even more perilous than the entrance, as all the forts and gunboats had taken the alarm. Their shots were falling around the *Intrepid* and dashing the spray into the faces of her men, as she swept down the harbor under sixteen long oars. The flames of the *Philadelphia*, the roaring of her guns as they went off one by one in the intense heat, the blinding flashes of the Turkish guns, and the uproar in the town, made the night one never to be forgotten; a fit ending to what Nelson pronounced "the most bold and daring act of the age." Decatur rejoined Stewart, who was waiting for him outside, and the two set sail for Syracuse.

The log of the *Constitution* has the following entry concerning this event:—

SUNDAY, Feby. 19. — A. M. At 10 appeared in the offing the United States Brig *Syren* and the *Intrepid*. The wind being light we sent boats out to assist towing in. At  $\frac{1}{2}$  past 10 they passed through our squadron in triumph receiving three cheers as they passed. Lieutenant Stewart of the *Syren* and Lieutenant Decatur of

the Intrepid waited on the Commodore and informed him they had passed into the harbor of Tripoli agreeably to his orders, burnt and totally destroyed the late United States Frigate Philadelphia. The business being so well planned not a man was killed or wounded on our side. The Tripolitans had 20 killed, the others made their escape by jumping overboard after the ship was afire.

The officer who wrote the log was evidently not well informed, as Stewart did not go in with Decatur. If that was the original plan, the conditions of the weather did not favor it.

This deed deserves to rank high in the annals of our Navy, not so much because it displayed an uncommon courage, but rather because of the skill and coolness which made it a complete success. Few American sailors are without daring to undertake a hazardous service, yet few men have the necessary presence of mind to carry it through without a hitch. Three times the expedition was recovered from failure by the exercise of the good judgment which marks Decatur's career.

The extraordinary activity of the Constitution during the spring and summer of 1804 was almost like the work of a modern steamer. She left Syracuse on the 1st of March, and had put to sea nineteen times from that or other ports by the end of July, being under sail half the time. March 27,

Preble was at Tripoli, and sent a flag of truce in with letters for the captive officers. He proposed an exchange of prisoners, but failed to secure the consent of the Dey. Permission was given to send provisions and clothing for the captives. Three days later, the ship was caught in a heavy north-east gale and swept to the westward along the coast. During the month of April she was twice in the harbor of Tunis to keep an eye on the Dey and his navy. Toward the end of the month the Siren captured a Tripolitan brig used for carrying military stores. She was refitted and called the Scourge. Preble now made a voyage to Naples for the purpose of obtaining money and additional gunboats. He succeeded in getting an order from the King for gunboats and bomb-vessels "under the title of a friendly loan." They were found at Messina, from which port the Constitution sailed in convoy of six gun-vessels and two mortar-boats with their ammunition. Having reached Syracuse and left them to be gotten ready for service, she sailed successively to Malta, Tripoli, and Tunis. She touched at the last place to ascertain why so many Tunisian cruisers had put to sea. On the 25th of June they were back in Syracuse, where Preble addressed himself seriously to preparations for an attack on the ships and fortifications of Tripoli. He sailed for that purpose on July 14,





ATTACK ON FORTIFICATIONS AND GUNBOATS AT TRIPOLI



with the gun-vessels and mortar-boats in tow, and reached the coast on the 24th.

As he was already short of men for his own ships, the boats borrowed from Naples were in part manned by Neapolitans shipped for the occasion. Not one of these vessels exceeded thirty tons burden, and they were but poor craft, fit only for use in a smooth sea and needing much "nursing" at all times. Each of the bomb-vessels mounted one 13-inch brass mortar, and had a crew of forty men, and each of the gunboats carried a long 24-pounder in the bow. The defenses of the Dey were very formidable. The city was walled, and the shore batteries mounted 119 guns, many of heavy calibre. In the harbor were nineteen gunboats, two large galleys, two schooners and a brig, all well armed and manned. The Tripolitan force on shore and afloat numbered upwards of 25,000, to oppose the American squadron carrying 1060 men. Preble had in all one frigate, three brigs, three schooners, six gunboats, and two mortar-boats. The Constitution carried at this time thirty long 24-pounders on the gun-deck, and six long 26-pounders and some lighter guns on the fore-castle and quarter-deck.

The work for which the squadron had been patiently preparing during the past ten months had come at last, and they went at it with ferocious

energy. They made five attacks between July 25 and September 4, in three of which the Constitution took part; in fact, they were pounding away at the forts and gunboats whenever the weather would permit. On the 24th, the water-casks of the smaller boats were all filled from the flagship as a precautionary measure, since they carried only six days' supply. The first assault was planned for the next day, but the wind proved unfavorable. Again, on the 28th, they were headed in and anchored within two and a half miles of the town. The plan was to tow the gunboats, arranged in two divisions, and the mortar-boats as close to the shore as it was possible for the heavier vessels to go, and then to cast them off and cover them with the squadron's guns for an attack upon the Tripolitan gunboats inshore. With this attack in view the ships had anchored, but a sudden change of wind, which developed into a northeast gale, drove them to sea for several days. On the 31st, the gale had become so violent as to split the Constitution's foresail and main topsail, although she was under double reefs, and the gunboats were in great danger.

The first attack was finally carried out on the afternoon of August 4, with the wind east by south. The whole fleet stood in to point-blank range of the batteries and shipping. Their position is

shown on the chart just outside the barrier reef and nearly north of the two western entrances. The six gunboats then advanced to attack the Tripolitan gunboats, twenty-one of which had come outside in three divisions. The action began by a bomb-vessel throwing a shell into the town, and lasted about two hours, when the ships were compelled to haul off by a change of wind.

The furious charge of the small vessels upon three and a half times their number soon undeceived the Tripolitans, who had come out in the belief that the Americans would not fight. The conflicts were like the traditional old sea-fights, hand to hand on the decks of the enemy, who fought desperately enough when boarded by the Americans. They were driven back into the harbor with severe loss in killed and wounded. Three of their gunboats were brought away with fifty-two prisoners, some of whom died of their wounds; forty-four had been killed outright before the boats were surrendered. The American vessels had suffered only slightly in killed and wounded. James Decatur was treacherously killed in the act of boarding a Tripolitan who had surrendered to him. Three boats were sunk in the harbor, and as many more had their decks nearly cleared of men. A number of shells burst in the town and batteries, and a minaret was knocked down. The inhabitants

were panic-stricken. The Constitution fired 262 round shot, beside grape, double-head, and canister. She received some damage in her rigging and sails from the Tripolitan fire, and a 24-pound shot struck her mainmast, but the squadron came out with remarkably little injury considering the serious nature of the action and the effect accomplished.

The wounded were all carried on board the Constitution for the surgeon's care, and the prisoners were confined on board of her. In his report Commodore Preble speaks in the highest terms of Decatur and Trippe and of all the officers and crews. Yet he was greatly disappointed in not having destroyed the whole fleet. There is a story that when Decatur came over the side, he walked joyfully up to Preble on the quarter-deck and said, "Well, Commodore, I have brought you out three of the gunboats." Preble turned on him like a flash, and taking him by the collar replied, "Aye, sir, why did you not bring me out more?" and then walked into his cabin. He sent for Decatur in a few minutes and made ample amends for his rage and injustice. They were always warm friends afterwards.

The stubborn nature of the fighting is exhibited by two stories told in footnotes of the Naval Chronicle. Decatur boarded a gunboat, it is said, to avenge his brother's death. He made straight

for her commander, a gigantic Turk, greatly his superior in size and strength, and in the struggle which ensued broke his sword. The two seized each other in a violent scuffle, in which Decatur was thrown. The Turk drew a dagger to stab him, but he managed to get hold of a pistol which he had in the right-hand pocket of his trousers. By twisting it around and cocking it inside of the pocket he succeeded in firing it and killing his antagonist. During the struggle one of the Tripolitans rushed forward to save his captain, and aimed a blow at Decatur's head, but a young man by the name of Reuben James, who had lost the use of his arms by severe wounds, threw his body forward and took the blow intended for Decatur on his own head. He lived to receive a pension from the government thirty years later.

Lieutenant Trippe, with Midshipman Henley and nine men, boarded one of the gunboats manned by thirty-six men. Against desperate resistance he captured the boat, after having killed fourteen Tripolitans and taken twenty-two prisoners. Trippe received eleven sabre wounds, but not an American was killed.

The next three days were spent in refitting and getting ready for another attack; the three Tripolitan gunboats were manned and added to the attacking squadron. A French privateer which

had come out was prevailed upon to carry fourteen badly wounded Tripolitans on shore, where their friends might take care of them. The vessel brought out a letter from the French consul on the morning of the 7th, saying that since the attack the Dey was disposed to accept reasonable terms, and advising Commodore Preble to send in a flag of truce. This was declined, as the white flag was not hoisted on the Dey's castle, and the second attack began forthwith. The direction of the wind and current rendered it inadvisable to engage the batteries with the Constitution ; so that all the work was done by the smaller vessels. The bomb-vessels were stationed to the west out of range of the batteries, where they could throw shells into the town ; and the gunboats, propelled by oars and sails, made an attack upon the western batteries. Five hundred and forty-eight shots were fired, and the town must have suffered great damage. The Tripolitan ships had remained in the harbor behind the shelter of the rocks. Early in the action one of the prize gunboats was blown up by an explosion of her magazine, which had been penetrated by a hot shot from the batteries. Lieutenant Caldwell, Midshipman Dorsey, and eight men were killed. The others escaped. Midshipman Spence gained great credit for remaining on board while the boat was sinking, to complete the loading of a



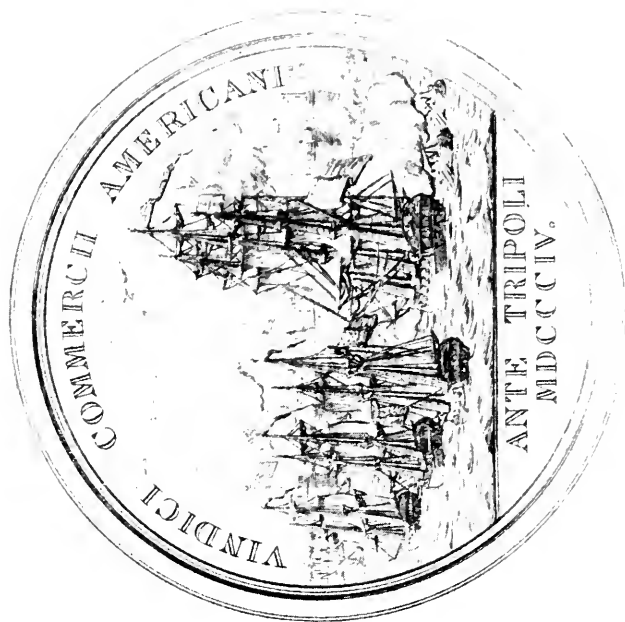
gun which he had been superintending when the explosion occurred. He and a few survivors actually fired the gun as the vessel sank, and escaped to the nearest boat. Mr. Spence did not know how to swim, and had to keep himself afloat with an oar.

The squadron hauled off at six o'clock, the *Argus* having been sent in chase of a strange sail. This sail proved to be the *John Adams*, Captain Chauncey, just out from the United States with the news that the government had decided to assemble an overwhelming force, and that several frigates were shortly to join under command of Commodore Samuel Barron, who was to supersede Preble. As the *John Adams* did not have her gun-carriage she was of no use to the squadron excepting in the supply of additional men. Her crew were distributed around. Preble waited eleven days for the appearance of his successor, and then concluded to make another attack, but a northeast gale forced him to stand off the coast for greater safety. After four days of buffeting in a heavy sea, the ships stood in again and anchored six miles from Tripoli. During the stay on the coast the small ships had received their fresh water and supplies from the *Constitution*, and now arrived a supply-ship from Malta with water and live-stock, much to the gratification of all the crews.

On August 10, the Dey indicated a disposition to treat by permitting a white flag to be hoisted by the French consul. A boat was sent in under a flag of truce, but the terms offered, a ransom of \$500 for each captive and no tribute for terminating the war, were not satisfactory to Preble, in spite of the tremendous reduction over any of the previous terms. He authorized the French consul to offer \$100,000 in a lump sum, but this was not acceptable to the Dey.

On the 24th, the squadron drew close to the harbor, intending to attack the town and shipping at night. It fell calm at midnight, and the smaller vessels had to be towed in. The bombardment lasted from two o'clock until daylight, principally from the mortar-boats, but little damage was done. One shell passed through the wall of the prison and struck the bed in which Captain Bainbridge was sleeping. A heap of stones and mortar fell on him, but he escaped with only slight injury.

For a few days the weather was again unfavorable for operations. On the night of the 28th, the ships moved in, prepared for another early morning attack. The Constitution anchored about one mile and a half to the northeast of the entrance, while the smaller vessels went close to the rocks and opened a heavy fire upon everything in sight.



PREBLE MEDAL.



The Tripolitans returned the fire without much effect, as the night doubtless covered the movements of our boats. At daylight, all vessels were recalled, and the Constitution stood in alone, under a heavy fire from the batteries, to within 400 yards of the rocks. Preble wrote in his report to the Secretary of the Navy; "We continued running in, until we were within musket shot of the Crown and Mole batteries, when we brought to, and fired upwards of three hundred round shot, besides grape and canister, into the town, Bashaw's Castle, and batteries. We silenced the castle and two of the batteries for some time. At a quarter past six, the gunboats being all out of shot and in tow, I hauled off, after having been three quarters of an hour in close action. The gunboats fired upwards of four hundred round shot, besides grape and canister, with good effect. A large Tunisian galliot was sunk in the mole — a Spanish Seignior received considerable damage. The Tripoline galleys and gunboats lost many men and were much cut."

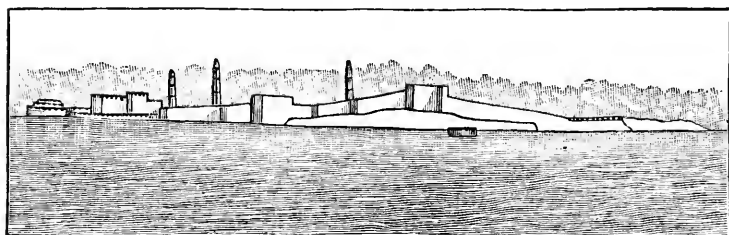
The Constitution suffered in her rigging, which was much cut up, and some grape-shot was found sticking in the hull, but not a man was hurt. Shortly after six o'clock, as stated in Preble's report, he hauled off to repair damages and prepare the fleet for another attack. Captain Chauncey,

of the John Adams, served during this action and the next one on the deck of the Constitution. At noon all the ships were anchored about five miles to the eastward of Tripoli.

They spent the next five days getting water and stores on board and otherwise putting everything in order. On September 3, with the wind east by north, the gunboats advanced against the Tripolitan fleet, which by rare judgment had moved up the harbor to the windward of the entrance, and near Fort English. As our ships could not beat up the harbor to attack them, the smaller vessels were all employed close to the rocks, firing at them. There was no boarding as in some of the earlier contests. The bomb-vessels and the Constitution attacked the town and the batteries. The latter fired eleven broadsides. The action lasted about an hour in the afternoon, when the wind shifted to the northward and began increasing. The squadron was accordingly withdrawn, having disabled a number of the enemy's galleys and gunboats, and thrown a number of shells into the batteries and town.

Preble at once began preparing his ships for another attack, although the weather was unsettled and he was getting short of ammunition. On the night of September 4, occurred that disaster which will always envelop the end of the Intrepid

in a melancholy mystery. Commodore Preble had been contemplating for some time the possibility of sending a fire-ship into the harbor to destroy the enemy's shipping. Richard Somers, the commander of the *Nautilus*, volunteered for the service, and for several days had been directing the preparation of the *Intrepid*. One hundred barrels of powder were placed below her deck, upon which one hundred and fifty fixed shells were



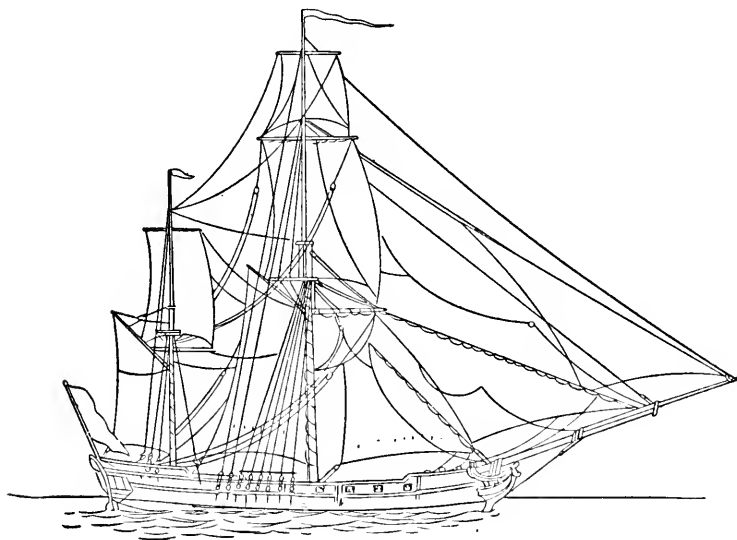
TRIPOLI FORTIFICATIONS, FROM SKETCH MADE BY HENRY  
WADSWORTH

arranged. A fuse calculated to burn fifteen minutes was led aft to a box filled with combustibles. The intention was to take the ketch into the harbor on the first dark night that afforded them a favorable breeze, and to explode her among the shipping. Two swift boats were carried in tow to provide for the escape of the crew, consisting of Captain Somers and four men from the *Nautilus*, with Lieutenants Henry Wadsworth and Joseph Israel, and six men from the *Constitution*. At eight o'clock on September 4, the *Intrepid* was

under sail standing for the western entrance. The *Argus*, *Vixen*, and *Nautilus* accompanied her as far as the rocks. The first lieutenant of the *Nautilus* was the last person to speak to Somers. The *Intrepid* was last seen standing into the harbor about a musket-shot from the mole, as her sails were swallowed up in the darkness. Soon after, the batteries, which had taken alarm, began firing in all directions from which danger might be apprehended. To those waiting outside for the return of their comrades, there was only a short period of breathless suspense. Then, before the *Intrepid* could possibly have reached her intended position, there was a blinding flash, followed by a frightful concussion which shook even the American ships outside and awed the batteries into silence. For one instant the mast and sail outlined in fire were lifted into the air and then fell back into darkness. The three ships at the entrance waited all night, their crews listening in vain for the oars of the returning boats. They never came back, and from that day to this the cause of the explosion has been a matter of conjecture. Some of the officers held that the *Intrepid* grounded near one of the batteries and was blown up by a shot penetrating the magazine; others, that a light was dropped into the powder by some one running to set off the combustibles. A light moving rapidly along the deck was



seen just before the explosion. Commodore Preble believed that the ketch was intercepted by some gunboats which were seen lurking near the rocks at sunset. His theory was that they suddenly boarded her without suspecting her to be a fire-ship, and that Somers, preferring death to surrender and failure, put a match to the magazine. He



KETCH

based this belief upon the known determination of Somers and his officers neither to be taken nor to let the powder and shot fall into the hands of the enemy, and upon the disappearance of one of the enemy's largest gunboats. Several others were observed to be very much shattered the next day. Captain Bainbridge was afterwards permitted to

view certain mutilated bodies which drifted on shore, but he could not identify them. Whatever happened, the name of Somers will always remain a watchword in the Navy and a symbol of the self-renunciation and love which ennoble humanity. He and his companions died in early manhood unsullied, and left behind them imperishable names.

Some light is shed on the tragedy by a story given in General Eaton's memoirs. He was in Egypt during the winter following Preble's campaign, organizing the land attack against Tripoli. An Arnaut Turk who had been in the service of the Dey and was friendly to the Tripolitan cause said to him: "Tripoli has lost many men in the different attacks of the Americans last summer; the town was much damaged and the inhabitants under such a state of consternation that nobody slept in the city and that no business was done there." As Eaton continues, "He confirmed the account of the fire-ship, *Infernal*, being blown up by Captain Somers after having been boarded by two row galleys. Stating this fact, the fellow wept. He observed that the war had been unfortunate to the cruisers. They had been led to believe that the Americans were all merchantmen, and that they should have nothing to do but to go out and bring them in; but they found them devils from whom nothing was to be gained in war."

Thus ended the war, for there were no more attacks. Bad weather and the uncertain season drove the squadron off the coast. On the 6th of September, Preble sent all except the *Constitution*, *Argus*, and *Vixen* to Syracuse, remaining himself on the blockade to await the arrival of his successor. On the 10th, the frigates *President* and *Constellation* made their appearance, and Commodore Barron took command. Two days later, while Preble was still on board, the *Constitution* chased and took two prizes laden with wheat for Tripoli. The city was said to be in a state bordering on starvation. The relief of Commodore Preble was not intended as a reflection upon him, although it did look like ingratitude to supersede him and to give his successor four additional frigates just as he had licked the Dey into shape for a reasonable peace. That he felt it seriously is shown by his journal, but he never made any complaint. The news traveled slowly, in those days; and the relief ships had been commissioned in consequence of the loss of the *Philadelphia* months before the result of the blockade was known. Congress voted him the nation's thanks and a gold medal, emblematic of the attacks on the town, batteries, and naval force of Tripoli, and the Secretary of the Navy wrote him a letter expressing unqualified approbation of his work.

The singular good luck of the Constitution followed her through the whole of this war. She suffered comparatively little injury and lost not one man in the five assaults upon the Tripolitan batteries. The only man wounded on her decks was a marine, whose arm was shattered during the first attack.

The approach of winter decided Commodore Barron to follow out Preble's plan of keeping up a continuous blockade with two or three ships, and to hold the others at Syracuse until spring. The Constellation and the Congress, which had just arrived under Captain John Rodgers, were accordingly left on the station. On the 14th of September, the Constitution proceeded to Malta, and there Preble left her with the heartfelt regret of everybody in the squadron. The officers even went so far as to address him a letter of regret, which all signed. He joined the John Adams, and, after winding up his affairs, sailed for home in December.

Decatur, who had been promoted to captain in recognition of his gallant exploit on the Philadelphia, was transferred to the command of the Constitution, but he kept her only about seven weeks. On November 6, he exchanged with Rodgers, who was his senior, to the Congress, a smaller ship. The Constitution was eighty men short, and she

required some new sails, a cable, and a bowsprit. It was therefore thought advisable to send her to Lisbon to recruit and repair. She sailed on November 27, and arrived in Lisbon on December 28, having encountered head winds. Nearly six weeks were consumed in procuring the necessary outfit, and she then returned, stopping at Tangier to impress the Moors. We find her on the blockade once more in the early part of the month of March, 1805, where she reappeared at intervals until the negotiations for peace began. On the 24th of April, she captured a Tripolitan privateer having two Neapolitan prizes, and on May 22 she was made the flagship by Captain Rodgers, who had succeeded to the chief command. Commodore Barron was forced by serious illness to leave the squadron.

Colonel Lear came on from Algiers in May, and a treaty was drawn up in the cabin of the *Constitution* by which the tribute to Tripoli ceased, peace was declared without indemnity, and the American captives were surrendered on the payment of \$60,000. The Spanish consul represented the Dey in the earlier negotiations, but the Danish consul, who had been so tireless in his efforts to aid the American captives, finally concluded them. The Dey was probably influenced towards peace with America by the successful land attack made

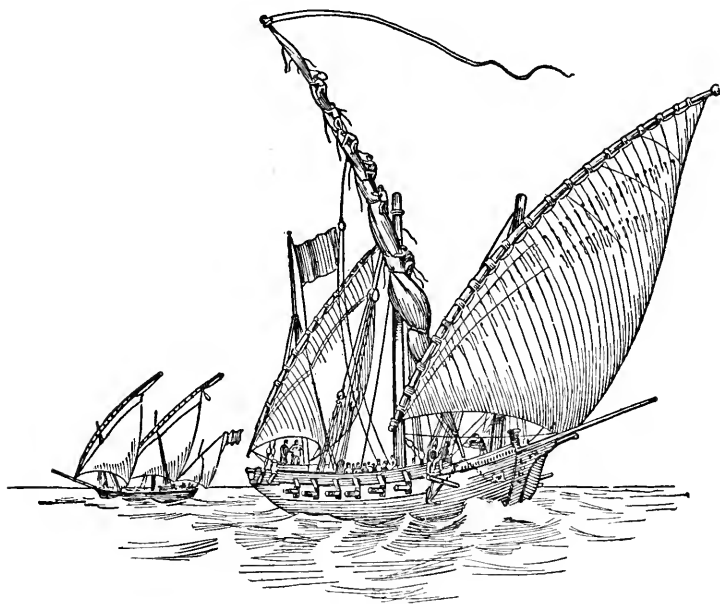
by his brother and General Eaton against Derne. He himself was a usurper who had driven his brother out some years before, and now no doubt he feared a turn of fortune's wheel.

A figure appears from time to time in connection with the war that deserves notice. It was Sidi Mahomet Dghies, the Dey's minister, a man of great nobility. He has been described as a cultivated man of the world. He did much to make the lot of Bainbridge and his men less hard, and he opposed the war without success. Another man who has not been mentioned is Nathaniel Haraden, the sailing-master of the Constitution. It was his duty to look after the sails and rigging when the ship went into action. He earned the nickname of "Jumping Billy," from his frequent use of the purchase by that name. He was a native of Massachusetts, but had been impressed and had served a long time in the British Navy.

The treaty was signed on June 3, 1805, and salutes were exchanged between the Constitution and the batteries on shore. In the mean time the Bey of Tunis had been threatening trouble unless certain ships which had been captured while running the blockade were forthwith surrendered. Commodore Rodgers therefore moved down with nearly the whole of his fleet and anchored off Tunis on August 1. After certain dilatory negotiations

which lasted two weeks, and which gave Rodgers the impression that the Bey was seeking only to get rid of the squadron by vague promises, he wrote the following in a letter to the consul-general : —

“ He (the Bey) must do one of three things, by simple request, or else do all three by force. He must give the



CORSAIR

guarantee already required — or, he must give sufficient security for peace and send a minister to the United States — or, he must make such alterations in the treaty as you may require, and as may satisfy you that there is confidence to be placed in what he does.

“ I have only to repeat, that if he does not do all that

is necessary and proper, at the risk of my conduct being disapproved by my country, he shall feel the vengeance of the squadron now in the bay.”

This startling departure from the timid and feeble foreign policy of the United States during its first ten years produced its effect, and a treaty was signed with Tunis ending tribute forever.

The active operations in the Mediterranean ended with this incident, but for some years a few ships were kept on the station for observation of the Barbary States. Our merchant-ships were never afterwards molested. The squadron was gradually reduced, and Commodore Rodgers returned home in May, 1806, giving up the command of the Constitution to Captain Hugh G. Campbell, who kept her cruising from port to port another year. The detention which held the crew so long over their terms of enlistment and gave rise to an attempt at mutiny was caused by the failure of her relief, the Chesapeake, to put in an appearance.



## CHAPTER VII

### OUTBREAK OF THE WAR OF 1812

THE years following the treaties with the Barbary States form a period of indifference towards the Navy, notwithstanding the growing trouble with England. The policy of the government was both weak and foolish. Materials which had been collected in 1799 and 1800 towards building six line-of-battle-ships had been frittered away on repairs and reconstruction of old ships. Besides this, the administration under Jefferson was soon bitten with the idea of a mosquito fleet of small gunboats for coast defense. The demand for such vessels at Tripoli and subsequently in the waters of the Gulf for use against the Spaniards had given rise to a theory of warfare which subsequent events proved altogether fallacious. The inland waters along the east coast seemed to offer exceptional facilities for sudden attack upon an enemy by numerous small ships carrying only a few guns each. It was thought that if enough of them could concentrate upon a blockading ship, she would easily be captured ; and

that, if they found themselves in danger, they could retire to the shallow waters beyond the reach of an enemy's guns. Nothing could have been more wasteful or more destructive of the morale of the service. Mr. Jefferson ought to have known from the ineffectiveness of the Tripolitan gunboats against the Constitution that such craft were of no use whatever in case of a blockade.

The periodic return of this mania for something cheap should be a warning to the country even now. Almost every Congress has passed through a stage of discussing small vessels for coast work. They may be very useful as auxiliaries to real fighting-ships, but if we have to choose between the two classes, it is far better to put ten millions of dollars into three battle-ships than four millions into fifty torpedo-boats. The painful steps and mistaken theories by which our nation has acquired experience should serve us in these days of rapid change.

The purchase of Louisiana relieved the government of its uneasiness in the Spanish business, but the building of gunboats went on. In 1806 the President reported that fifty were ready for commission, and recommended more of them. About 257 vessels of this description were eventually built, and they may be dismissed with the statement that in the war which followed a few years

later they were permitted to rot well out of reach of British cruisers. Events were shaping themselves rapidly, and the time was fast approaching when the Constitution was in one battle to do more to give us a national pride, to teach foreign respect for American arms, and to turn our Congress towards correct theories of the country's defense, than the entire navy of gunboats could ever have done.

The Chesapeake, then at the Washington Navy Yard under repairs, had been detailed for the Constitution's relief. Commodore James Barron was to go out in command of the station. There was great delay in getting her ready for sea, but finally she dropped down to Norfolk for the completion of her armament. Before she left Washington, however, the British minister complained that three deserters from the British ship *Melampus* had enlisted upon her. The matter was investigated, and they were found to be deserters, as claimed, but men who had been impressed from American ships and had taken the first opportunity of escaping to their own country. The Chesapeake sailed for the Mediterranean on June 22, 1807, and was accompanied to sea by the English frigate *Leopard*, of superior force. When some miles out the English captain sent on board an order from Vice-Admiral Berkeley directing him on meeting the Chesapeake "to search her for deserters."

Commodore Barron did not have his ship cleared for action, and he delayed a reply, but the Englishman recalled his messenger and fired broadside after broadside into her, until the flag was hauled down. A number of men were wounded. An officer was then sent on board, the American crew were mustered on deck, and four men removed. This outrage will never be forgotten, although there were many people at the time who wished to pass it by without protest. It was, however, the concrete fact which ultimately had much influence in providing a majority in Congress towards fitting out all of our frigates for service. In the end the English government disavowed the act and returned the two survivors of these four men to the deck of the ship from which they had been taken. The resulting negotiations, which were conducted in better temper, saved the country from immediate war and gave us time for better preparation.

The Chesapeake returned to Hampton Roads, and the Constitution was left to come home without a relief. She arrived in Boston in the fall of 1807, but was ordered to New York for the crew to be paid off. There she was dismantled for repairs and lay for nearly two years. We hear nothing of her during this period, but no doubt she was thoroughly overhauled for service on the home station. It is probable, also, that she received her

heaviest battery during this time, for her sailing qualities fell off. In August, 1809, her old commander, John Rodgers, took her as his flagship in the northern squadron, but he kept her only a year. He transferred his flag to the President in the belief that she was a faster ship, and turned over the Constitution to Isaac Hull, who had been her first lieutenant in the race with the English frigate. About this time the officers had a tendency to overload their ships with guns, and there can be no doubt that the English opinion of their armament was in part correct. It was too heavy. When Hull took command of the Constitution she carried on her gun-deck thirty long 24-pounders, on her quarter-deck sixteen 32-pounder carronades, and on her forecastle two long bow chasers and six 32-pounder carronades. She was a very wet ship when going on the wind, and rode heavily at her anchors.

The year 1810 was spent cruising on the home station. She visited Hampton Roads and various ports. We find her during the winter of 1810-11 at New London in company with the President and Congress. After a short cruise on the east coast and a visit to Boston in the spring she went to Annapolis for the purpose of conveying across the Atlantic the new minister to France, and the money to pay the interest on the Dutch debt. Mr.

Joel Barlow kept her waiting in Annapolis Roads from May until August, when he arrived on board with his wife and her sister Miss Baldwin. They sailed on August 1, and had a very pleasant voyage of five weeks to Cherbourg. This port was blockaded by a strong British squadron, and there seemed to be some disposition to delay the Constitution. A lieutenant was sent on board from the British flagship with a request that the commodore would like to see Captain Hull on board. When the invitation was politely declined, the messenger made a second request that he delay his entry into Cherbourg until a certain hour the next day. Hull also refused to consider this. He explained that the American minister to France was on board and that he felt it his duty to get into port as soon as the weather permitted.

The times were critical for an American frigate in the English channel. British ships were everywhere, and the whole French coast was under blockade. The growing irritation which was shortly to break out into war did not promote friendliness between the sailors of the two nations. A subsequent visit to Portsmouth was like putting one's head in the lion's mouth ; but Hull came out of it well, although at one time an open rupture seemed to hang on the toss of a coin.

The ship sailed from Cherbourg September 12,

and proceeded to the Texel, where the specie was landed. She then returned for Mr. Russell, who was to be carried across the channel to his new post at London. While entering Cherbourg some of the British blockading ships beat up the harbor with her and thereby drew the fire of the French batteries. For some reason Captain Hull did not display the private signals agreed upon, and the Frenchmen doubtless taking him for an Englishman fired four shots at the Constitution. As stated in the log for October 13, "At  $\frac{1}{2}$  past 3 four shot were fired from the French batteries, 2 of which struck the ship, 1 passing through the Starb<sup>d</sup> waist nettings, taking off the stern of the 2d cutter and through the lee clew of the main sail. The other struck in the bends just aft the fore chains."

On November 11, she sailed for Portsmouth with Mr. Russell and a number of passengers, all of whom were landed the next day. Captain Hull accompanied them to London for a short visit, and was therefore absent during the following curious exchange of men between the Constitution and the British fleet.

Very late on the evening of November 13, a boat came alongside from the English frigate Havanah, and an officer informed Lieutenant Charles Morris, in temporary command, that a deserter

from the Constitution had just swum off to his ship. Mr. Morris thanked him and said that the man would be sent for in the morning ; but when morning came the captain of the Havannah had either reconsidered the case or had received instruction from the flagship. He refused to give the man up without an order from the admiral, Sir Roger Curtis. The lieutenant then waited on the admiral and made a formal demand for the deserter's surrender. His demand was met by the question whether the Americans would surrender British deserters to their ships, or not. He replied that Captain Hull would probably accede to any agreement of mutual advantage. The admiral then informed him that the man had claimed protection as a British subject, and that he must therefore be retained. A few nights later Mr. Morris was awakened "by the discharge of a sentry's musket and the cries of a man in the water near the ship." When taken on board he proved to be a deserter from the Havannah, but declared himself an American. As Mr. Morris says in his biography, "This was sufficient. A boat was immediately sent to the Havannah to reciprocate the politeness of the preceding evening, and the next morning we had the satisfaction of assigning the same reason and the same testimony for refusing a demand for his restitution from the captain and admiral." The



subject was much discussed on shore, and there were threats of using force. Two English frigates moved down quite near the Constitution, so that she had great difficulty in changing her anchorage without fouling them. Captain Hull, who had come on board in the mean time, fully sustained Mr. Morris in his course, and directed him upon the turn of the tide to drop down to St. Helen's Roads; but the two English frigates again got up their anchors and moved to positions near the Constitution. That the Americans had learned a lesson from the Chesapeake affair is very well shown by the brief entries in the log of what took place. The following are given verbatim:—

Nov. 13, 1811.—At Sunset mustered the crew at Quarters,  $\frac{1}{2}$  past 8 P. M. an officer came alongside from the Admiral and said they had taken up a Man which had swam from the Constitution. It proved to be Thomas Holland, a Seaman. Fresh breeze and cloudy with rain during the night.

Nov. 17. At Sunset mustered the Crew at Quarters. At 8 P. M., John Burnes Swam on board from an English Ship. Light breezes and clear.

Nov. 19. At 9 A. M. Sent up Top. G. masts and unmoored Ship. At Meridian, hove up the Starboard Anchor and stood down to St. Hellens Roads under the Top Sails. Gunners employed overhauling the Guns and sending up Grape and Round Shott.

Nov. 20. Anchored in St. Hellens Roads.

Nov. 21. At  $\frac{1}{2}$  past 3 Hove Short on the Larboard Cable, beat to Quarters and cleared away the Guns, got everything ready for Action.  $\frac{1}{4}$  before 4 Hove up the Anchor, Made Sail and stood out into the Channell. At 4 light breezes and clear. From 4 to 6 Employed Stowing Anchor & preparing the ship for action.

Although their spelling and capitals were not always reliable, we can have entire faith in their readiness to maintain the rights of the flag. They stood out of the harbor calmly, without fear, and therefore without molestation from the British frigate which accompanied them to sea. Two days later they entered Cherbourg, and Mr. Morris was sent up to Paris for dispatches from Mr. Barlow to the home government. He was detained six weeks, and we find a very interesting glimpse of Napoleon and official Paris during this time in his autobiography. He met Lafayette, Kosciusko, and many survivors of the French Revolution. Early in January he was back on board ship, and they sailed for home on the 10th.

During their stay in the Channel and North Sea, a number of deaths occurred on board ship. They are entered in the log almost always in the same stereotyped phrase, followed by a note regarding the weather; as, "At 2 A. M., John Fullington departed this life. Wind E. N. E." Another un-



CHARLES MORRIS



canny entry occurs occasionally during the winter, "Carpenters employed making Coffins." The weather must have been very boisterous, for the crew was kept busy securing the ship against wind and sea. The sails, yards, and cables gave no end of trouble. We may be sure that Captain Hull did not spare his men at this time. They anchored off Old Point Comfort after a very stormy passage of forty days, and late in March took the ship up to the Navy Yard at Washington for a thorough overhauling. All ammunition and guns had to be removed to get her over the bar in the Potomac River. Her sailing qualities had fallen off so much during this cruise that Captain Hull requested the Navy Department to have her hove out for examination and repair of the copper. There were no dry docks at this time, and the only method of obtaining access to the bottom of a ship was by careening her in shallow water. For this purpose she was usually made as light as possible. The stores and ballast were accordingly discharged from the Constitution, and the repairs to the copper bottom were completed in about five weeks. Her old sailing-master, "Jumping Billy" Haraden, was master of the Yard ; fortunately, as subsequent events proved. He took entire charge of the work on her and exercised special care in restowing her hold to give her the proper sailing trim. Only

about two thirds of the ballast was put back. The result was magical, and there is no doubt that Mr. Haraden contributed materially to her famous escape from an English squadron two months later.

War was declared against England on June 18, 1812, and again the entry in the Constitution's log exhibits a characteristic spirit. It is : —

June 20. At 5 P. M. the Commanding Officer, Lieutenant Read, had the crew turned up, and read to them the declaration of war between the United States and the United Kingdoms of Great Britain and Ireland, that had passed the Senate and authorizing the President James Madison to employ the Armies and Navy of the United States against the above written powers. The Crew manifested their Zeal in Support of the Honor of the United States Flagg by requesting of leave to Cheer on the occasion (granted them). Crew returned to their duty, light airs from the Southward and Eastward.

It was during this war that the Constitution found her most eventful career and earned her chief laurels. It may be well therefore to say a word about the preparation of the country for war and the odds against which our few frigates had to contend. The war sprang principally from inability to maintain our neutrality between France and England, and it has been called the second war of independence, — independence on the high seas.

As the Orders in Council were revoked five days after the declaration of war, we really fought three years for sailors' rights. For England to impress seamen in her own cities and bear them away from their families for service in the navy was cruel enough; but for her to take men out of our ships, both public and private, whenever an intemperate captain saw fit, was simply unbearable. Yet it lasted twenty years and more, during the period of our weakness. In fairness it may be said that international rights, especially those of neutrals, were very poorly defined one hundred years ago, and we knew as little as the rest of the world. Too great a predominance on the sea is fatal to generosity and good temper in dealing with other nations, and England was paying this penalty for her navy. Time has made clear that she stood for civilization and humanity during the Napoleonic wars. She saved Europe from a despotism that might ultimately have turned the entire Continent into another China. In this light, her naval predominance was the beacon selected by a divine Providence for the education of the human race. We may well deal charitably therefore with the rashness and despotic exercise of power which provoked war and also planted the seeds of defeat at our hands.

The astonishing part of the whole matter was

our absolute unpreparedness. We had only twenty ships for warfare on the open sea, and of these three were far gone in decay. So hopeless seemed the strength of the navy that the cabinet voted to lay up all the ships to prevent their capture by the English, and President Madison was only dissuaded with difficulty by Captains Bainbridge and Stewart, who happened to be in Washington, and who afterwards commanded the Constitution in successful actions. The war and the building up of a navy had been made so much a party question that Congress could not be prevailed upon to do anything until we were actually forced into hostilities, and then it was too late. But the country was very much divided even after war was declared. New England proved the most strenuous opponent, as she was the principal sufferer by reason of her large merchant marine shut up in port. Some of her citizens carried their opposition so far as to discuss secession. A victory over the English was needed to satisfy public opinion by giving all alike a cause for rejoicing. The hand of Providence had selected the Constitution for this service. Three times she went out from Boston to victory, and three times the New England people were fired with immense enthusiasm over the success of the ship built by their own hands. Nothing more fortunate has occurred in our history.



The position of England at the time was one of great strength on the sea. France, her only antagonist, had never recovered from Trafalgar; so that the duty of the English fleet was mainly confined to the blockade of French ports. For this purpose she had between six and seven hundred armed vessels, fifty of which were enough to seal up our harbors and destroy our little navy. Many of these were line-of-battle-ships, of which we had none, and against any one of which our few frigates could not hope to stand. Added to this tremendous preponderance was the confidence born of many years of successful warfare. The English sailors had won on every sea, and we were, comparatively speaking, untried. They had no thought of defeat, and we did not dream of victory. As an offset to this very great superiority many of the British ships were under-manned. The additional strain put upon England by the blockade of the American coast hampered the supply of Wellington's army and caused him to complain bitterly of a lack of coöperation between the Army and Navy. Lord Melville writes in 1813: "The drain of seamen which the American lake service has required has already greatly distressed us, and that the supply of seamen is so inadequate to the current demands of the service, as your lordship well knows, the ships in commission are

too frequently short of complement; but not less than six sail of the line and sixteen frigates with a great number of sloops and smaller vessels are at this moment ready to receive men and are lying useless because men cannot be supplied to them."

Attention has been called to the construction of our frigates and their great superiority over anything of the class afloat, but our readers can have no idea of the unreasoning controversy which sprang from our victories. It is worth while going into a further comparison between the Constitution and the two frigates she captured. The Secretary of War in his report for 1798 described our 36 and 44-gun frigates as "separately superior to any single European frigates of the usual dimensions." That is the plain truth of the matter, yet this was designated by the historian of the British Navy as a method "evidently to operate as a cheat or delusion upon the rest of the world." His grounds for making this statement were that our ships carried more guns and of greater calibre than their rating, and that they were as heavily built as British line-of-battle-ships. A comparison of the English frigate *Java* with the Constitution will serve to bring out the merits of the case and to show the inconsistencies of the rating on both sides. The *Java* was captured from the French

under the name of "La Renommée," and was described as a 40-gun ship. She actually carried 46 guns. The English rechristened her and changed the rating to 38 guns, although they increased the armament to 49 guns, just eleven more than the rate called for. She fired a broadside of 576 pounds.

The Constitution, rated as a 44-gun frigate, actually carried 52 guns, firing a nominal broadside of 704 pounds in her engagement with the Java. The smallest British line-of-battle-ship, the 74, carried 83 guns, with a broadside of 1032 pounds.

There was no intention to deceive in any of these cases. The nomenclature had grown up without much thought of its inconsistency. Little attention was paid to the number of carronades placed on the forecastle and quarter-deck; very much as we might now reckon the heavy guns of the Iowa and call her a 12-gun battle-ship, whereas her battery consists really of 46 guns of sizes from 12" down to  $\frac{1}{2}$ " calibre. The complement of men for the Constitution was 400, as previously stated; that for the Java was about 277. In the battle between them they carried 475 and 426 respectively. A line-of-battle-ship required 590 men in her crew. The larger decks of the Constitution did not give her so much more room for training the guns on

the main deck as would at first appear. These guns were heavier than those of the British frigate and there was one more on each broadside, so that the twenty feet additional length did not go very far. The advantage in the weight of guns and thickness of sides was, however, very decided, especially at long range. The Java, for instance, fired 18-pound shot at the Constitution, whose sides were from 17 to 20 inches thick, while the latter fired 24-pound shot at the former, whose sides were from  $11\frac{1}{4}$  to 15 inches thick. On the spar-deck they both carried 32-pound carronades, and were in that respect very nearly equal; but the range of the carronades was comparatively short, and ships had to close in to use them. With her superiority in long guns, the Constitution had only to choose her distance with judgment, and the result of the fight was certain.

For a long time it was said that our crews were made up of Englishmen enticed into the service. There is no doubt that the naval vessels of all countries carried many foreigners in their complements, and the United States was probably no exception to the rule; but the number of foreigners varied with the difficulty of getting seamen at home. The British were very hard pressed for men, and had to resort to impressment. Their ships rarely had the full numbers, and the comple-

ments were still further reduced by throwing into prison impressed American sailors who refused to fight against their country. During the war with Tripoli the accusation against us would probably have been true, except as to the word "enticing;" for our own sailors were engaged in a very profitable commerce. But the War of 1812 found many of our merchant-ships withdrawn from service, and great numbers of American sailors idle. Many embarked as privateers in the hope of rich booty from the enemy's commerce. It is probable, however, that at no period of our history have we had a greater percentage of American-born sailors in the Navy. The fact that impressment had never gained a foothold in this country was doubtless an element in our favor; for men who go willingly may be trusted to do far better work than those who are driven. The American sailors quickly learned gunnery, and responded to training far better than the English. They had to respond to training. It was their only hope against such overwhelming odds. Added to this, our officers made a careful and intelligent study of tactics, while the English still labored under the traditions of that king who said, "Lay me aboard of yon Frenchman. I wish to joust with him." Nelson had put this in different words, "Never mind manœuvres, always go at them." But his advice

proved misleading against a wary enemy who could shoot. Sir Howard Douglass has well stated the case in his treatise on Gunnery. "When the fleet of Europe opposed to us in the late war [1793-1815] had been swept from the face of the ocean by the gallant achievements of the British marine, a period of undisputed dominion ensued, during which our seamen were not, in general, sufficiently practiced in the exercise of those weapons by which that dominion had been gained, but, in the pride of conquest, were in many instances to lose much of that proficiency in warlike practice which had been acquired in a long series of arduous service."

"The danger of resting satisfied with superiority over a system so defective as that of our former opponents has been made sufficiently evident. We became too confident by being feebly opposed; then slack in warlike exercise, by not being opposed at all; and lastly, in many cases, inexpert for want even of drill practice; and herein consisted the great disadvantage under which, without suspecting it, we entered in 1812, with too great confidence, into a war with a marine much more expert than that of any of our European enemies."



ISAAC HULL





## CHAPTER VIII

### ESCAPE OF THE CONSTITUTION FROM A BRITISH SQUADRON

The War of 1812 could not be fought on any definite strategic plan. We had no line-of-battle-ships, and the disparity in resources and ships on the two sides forbade fleet actions. Our only hope lay in frequenting the trade routes of the enemy to do as much harm as possible to his commerce, and incidentally to fight frigates or sloops acting singly. Commodore Rodgers had a fleet during the war, but he accomplished very little with it. Without even one heavy fighting-ship, he could do nothing towards raising the blockade, and he remained perforce helpless. His ships were ultimately shut up in ports or scattered. The spirit which animated the officers on both sides was more that of the knights-errant. They seemed to enjoy combat, and challenges were often exchanged between single ships. Captain Broke sent a challenge in to Boston that he would meet Captain Lawrence in any latitude and longitude the latter would select for a

combat between the Shannon and the Chesapeake. Captain Bainbridge asked permission of the Navy Department to take the Constellation, a 36-gun frigate, out to fight any 38-gun frigate selected by the British Admiral. These duels seemed almost like submitting the cause to the prowess of single champions, instead of making it the test of the national resources and of the organization of a whole people for war. We cannot fail to admire, however, the high sense of honor of these officers and their sterling fidelity to the flags of their countries.

The Constitution left Washington on June 21, three days after the declaration of war, with orders to proceed to New York and join the squadron of Commodore Rodgers. Captain Hull commanded her, and Charles Morris was again her first lieutenant. Her complement was greatly deficient, some of her officers had not yet joined, only a part of the guns were mounted, and she was generally imperfect as to equipment. On the 25th of June she was at the mouth of the Potomac, and on the 28th at anchor off Annapolis for greater convenience to Baltimore, where men and stores could be obtained. Here she was put in order as rapidly as possible, the men were stationed, and new draughts came down from Baltimore to join her. On the 5th of July she got up anchor and stood down Chesa-

peake Bay, still receiving men and stores, until she passed out between the Capes on July 12. The crew were constantly drilled at the sails and the guns. The marvelous power of organization possessed by Captain Hull and Mr. Morris is well demonstrated by the ship's escape from a British squadron five days after putting to sea. This chase has become memorable in the Navy through the use of the kedge anchor in the shallow water off the New Jersey coast.

The officers attached to her at this time as nearly as may be ascertained were : —

*Captain*, Isaac Hull.

*Lieutenants*, Charles Morris, Alexander S. Wadsworth, George C. Read, Beekman V. Hoffman and John T. Shubrick.

*Sailing-master*, John C. Alwyn.

*Midshipmen*, Charles W. Morgan, Frederick Baury, Henry Gilliam, William D. Salter, William L. Gordon, William V. Taylor, John Tayloe, Ambrose D. Field, Joseph Cross, John A. Belcher, Alexander Eskridge, James Greenlaw, Allen Griffin, Lewis German, James W. Dulany and Thomas A. Beatty.

*Surgeon*, Amos A. Evans.

*Surgeon's Mates*, Donaldson Yeates and John D. Armstrong.

*Purser*, Thomas J. Chew.

*Lieutenants of Marines*, William S. Bush and John Contee.

They were probably all on board during the action with the *Guerrière*.

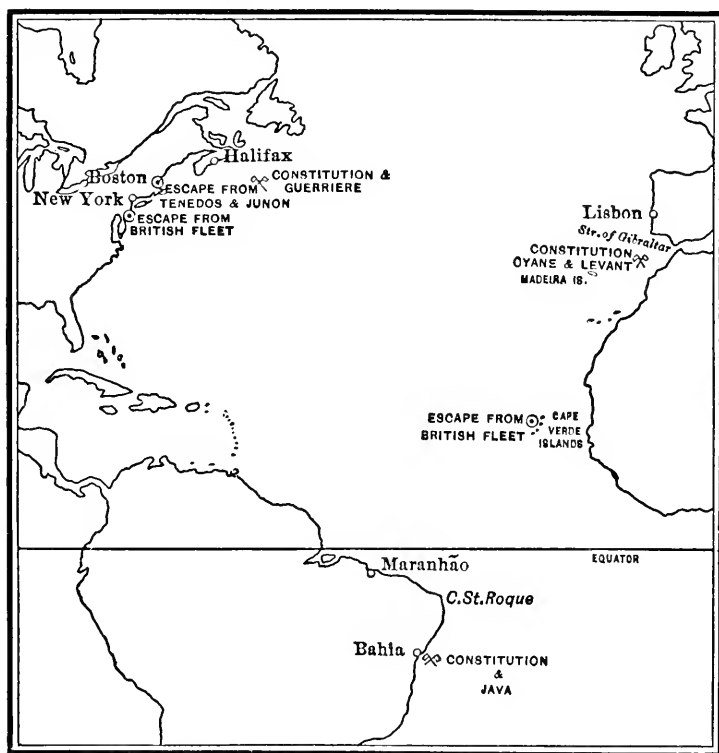
While Hull was sailing down the Chesapeake expecting to join Commodore Rodgers outside of New York, the latter's squadron was in the Gulf Stream looking for the Jamaica fleet. Rodgers had hurried to sea within an hour after he received word of the declaration of war, taking five ships with him. Two days out he sighted a British frigate to the northeast, and the whole squadron gave chase. The flagship, *President*, got near enough to throw a few shot into her, but was then delayed by the bursting of a gun and the chase got away. She proved to be the *Belvidera*, commanded by Captain Byron, who gained much credit for his seamanship in this affair. Without knowing it he had also saved the Jamaica fleet by delaying Commodore Rodgers in the effort to capture his small frigate. The chase was given up at sunset and the squadron turned in pursuit of the British merchant-ships, which they followed across the Atlantic, often approaching almost within sight of them. The *Belvidera* put into Halifax with the news that an American squadron was outside of New York, and a British squadron under Captain Broke was promptly sent out to look for them. Thus, Captain Hull found five British ships where he expected to meet Commodore Rodgers.

After clearing the Capes, the Constitution had made very slow progress up the coast against light contrary winds. At two o'clock on the afternoon of July 17, four sails were sighted from the mast-head to the northward heading towards the New Jersey coast. The wind, what there was of it, came from the northeast and the strangers had the weather gauge. Captain Hull, supposing them to be the American squadron, at first headed his ship around to join them. Two hours later, a fifth sail was sighted to the northeast coming down before the light wind, which soon died out entirely and left all the ships becalmed outside of range of one another. At six o'clock a shift of wind enabled Hull to head towards the last comer. This ship was the frigate *Guerrière*, commanded by Captain James R. Dacres, looking for the British squadron from which he had recently been separated. He had previously met them near Nantucket, while on his way to Halifax for repairs, water and provisions, and had been ordered to remain. This meeting was a fateful one, as the timbers of his ship were said to be decayed and the rigging in need of refitting. The delay of one month on the station threw her, on the continuance of her voyage north, directly in the way of the Constitution. By a curious coincidence, her consorts had lost sight of her the night before the Constitution appeared, and

when she hove in sight again they took her for a second American frigate, while Dacres suspected them to be the American squadron. Captain Hull was also uncertain about her identity, and had headed around to investigate her, as above stated. Thus, there were three parties to this meeting working at cross purposes. The other four ships were the 64-gun ship *Africa*, Captain Bastard, the 38-gun frigates *Shannon* and *Belvidera*, commanded respectively by captains Broke and Byron, and the 32-gun frigate *Æolus*, Captain Townsend.

At half-past seven Hull cleared ship for action as a precaution, and at half-past ten he displayed the private signals and kept them up three quarters of an hour without reply. This led him to head away cautiously until daybreak. At four o'clock in the morning the *Constitution* and the *Guerrière* were within range of each other, and Captain Dacres in his turn made signal, one rocket and two guns. As none of the ships answered the signal, he made haste to head away before the wind to escape from what he conceived to be Rodgers' squadron. Hull no longer doubted the nationality of the ships in whose midst he found himself when day broke, and to make matters as bad as possible, there was little or no wind. They had drifted with flapping sails the better

part of the night. At daylight, the British ran up their colors and gave chase. They had all the breeze at first, and gained. Two more vessels, a brig and a schooner, hove in sight astern at four



LOCATION OF BATTLES BETWEEN THE CONSTITUTION AND  
BRITISH FRIGATES, AND ESCAPES FROM PURSUING FLEETS

o'clock. An hour later some of the frigates began firing, but their shots passed over the Constitution without striking.

Commodore Morris, who has left us an admirable

account of this chase, says that the chances of escape were considered hopeless at this time. The Americans returned the fire, and the crew held to their work without flinching. Two 24-pound guns had been moved to the stern and mounted for firing directly aft by cutting away the taffrail, and two guns were run out of the cabin windows. The latter proved of no service, on account of the overhang of the stern. About 2300 gallons of fresh water were pumped out of the ship, and the sails were all wet down to close the texture of the canvas. At eight o'clock in the morning one of the frigates (Shannon) furled sails and was taken in tow by all the boats of the squadron. This drew her up steadily, and, as Mr. Morris again says, "seemed to decide our fate." But it was not to be. A sudden puff of wind gave the Constitution a few minutes' respite. While the Shannon was approaching a second time, Mr. Morris recalled the use of a kedge anchor on the President in going out of harbor, and suggested to Captain Hull that it be tried. They sounded and found a depth of twenty-five fathoms. Accordingly, the launch and a cutter were lowered and sent ahead with a kedge to which was secured a long line of hawsers and large ropes, — all that could be found in the ship: nearly a mile in length when fastened together. By dropping the kedge and hauling on





THE ESCAPE OF THE CONSTITUTION OFF THE NEW JERSEY COAST



the ropes the men gradually drew the ship ahead to the anchor, which was quickly taken up and carried out once more. Whenever the wind failed this process was repeated, until they finally got out of gunshot range from the British ships. The *Guerrière* was nearly abeam at one time in the forenoon and fired several broadsides, but the shot fell short.

The *Belvidera* was the first to observe the cause of the mysterious drawing ahead of the *Constitution*, and Captain Byron was quick to imitate. He even devised a superior method of kedging by making an anchor fast to each end of a rope passed through the two hawse holes. By this arrangement, one anchor was carried ahead while the men were hauling on the other, and the ship could be kept moving all the time. Fortunately, the lead was too great. The *Constitution's* crew were not allowed to relax their efforts during the whole day and night. Not an officer or man slept in his bunk. The relief watch lay down at their quarters on deck, and the guns were kept ready for action. The morning of the 19th found one frigate just out of range on the bow, two frigates on the beam, and one on the quarter, all to leeward, with the wind light but steady from the south. There were several other ships on the lee quarter, but some distance off. At daylight, the ship on the lee

bow tacked with every chance of getting within gunshot, but Captain Hull, who realized that he could not afford to have his ship crippled, decided to tack and take the risk of passing close to the smaller ship, the *Æolus*, on the port quarter. This he did, heading to the eastward and passing within range of the *Æolus*, which for some unexplained reason did not fire a shot. During the forenoon the frigate *Shannon*, which had tacked and come in astern of the *Constitution*, gained on her. Up to this point in the chase Mr. Morris had expressed a lack of confidence in his ship's sailing qualities. He says that for many years she had been "a very dull sailer," but now as the wind freshened she again drew ahead, and by two in the afternoon reached the unexpected speed of twelve and a half knots an hour.

The intense anxiety of the past thirty-six hours was now allayed and cheerfulness once more reigned, but still the crew was kept on the alert. During the day, all the boats were hoisted in while the ship was going through the water at considerable speed. It was reported, on the other hand, that the British cut adrift many of their boats to keep up with the chase; and that they subsequently spent several days picking them up. An incident recorded in the log of the *Constitution* during the forenoon exhibits a readiness to meet

emergencies which always characterized Hull. An American merchantman was sighted to windward, and the nearest English ship hoisted American colors as a decoy. Hull immediately sent up British colors. At six o'clock in the afternoon, a rain squall was seen approaching, and again his readiness is shown in the advantage which he obtained from it. All hands were sent to their stations and sail was shortened the instant the wind struck them. The pursuers, now some distance to leeward, observed the apparent confusion on the Constitution before the rain hid her from view, and made haste to get ready for the approaching blow by shortening sail and scattering. In the mean time Hull had quickly made sail again, and when the weather cleared had added another mile to his advantage.

Again during the night of the 19th, the officers and men remained on deck, but at daylight of the 20th all danger was considered at an end, and the crew took their first good rest in over sixty hours. The enemy's squadron were hull down to leeward. The last frigate to give up the chase was the Belvidera, as the other ships drew away towards the northeast. Mr. Brighton says in a life of Admiral Broke: "The vexation of the whole British squadron may be inferred from the following letter received by Broke from the gallant Byron, as well as

King's account of the sharp recriminations among the sailors. The commanders of the little squadron exchanged their explanations in the Shannon's cabin." Here follows Captain Byron's letter.

BELVIDERA, July 20th, 1812.

DEAR BROKE,

Nothing can exceed my mortification from the extraordinary escape of the American frigate, and I am likewise much concerned it should fall so heavily on Dacres. We were at quarters all night. The *Guerrière* and the American frigate were seen from us most of the night, and, *firing near together*, the impression upon my mind was they were both American frigates. We saw often lights on board both of them during the night, and I thought they were making signals to each other. I expected to be in action very early in the morning, and did not make signals, being apprehensive they might induce the enemy to make sail from us. I really did not think, from the squadron's position in the evening, the *Guerrière* would take the *Belvidera* and *Æolus* to be American frigates. About seven bells in the middle watch, as it must have been (as the night signal appears to have been made by *Guerrière* at 3.15), it was reported to me on the quarterdeck; but, from the haziness of the morning, I was not satisfactorily convinced it was the real night signal. I rather thought it was the signal to distinguish British ships from the enemy when going into or in action, and I had mine hanging at the gaff, ready for showing, all night. The American came

down within a mile of my bow, and hauled close away upon the starboard tack. My anxiety was not to frighten him away by signals. I am now very sorry I did not answer the *Guerrière's* signal, but it was so near daylight I thought a day signal might nearly be seen as well. Whatever I did was from the most anxious intention to secure the enemy ; and I have to regret that, from a succession of unfortunate circumstances, he should have escaped. I considered the rockets and guns of the *Guerrière* to announce an enemy in view ; but whether one or more ships the daylight immediately coming on would inform us.

Dear Broke,

Yours most sincerely,

R. BYRON.

It would seem as if fate were making sport of these ships. Had the *Guerrière* not joined the British squadron, or had the *Constitution* not escaped from it, our first frigate victory might have been long enough postponed to lead to discouragement and sharper divisions within the nation. One of the vessels sighted during the chase was the U. S. brig *Nautilus*. She was captured by the British squadron only a few hours out of New York, and her crew was transferred to the *Africa*. Her commander, Lieutenant William M. Crane, was kept a prisoner on his own ship until she reached Halifax. The other sail sighted was a merchant-schooner held as prize by the British.

As Captain Hull could not hope to run the blockade at New York, he headed for Boston, and within two hours after his escape was in chase of a sail which had been seen to the northward. She proved to be the American brig Sally, bound for Philadelphia, but when notified of the war she immediately headed for Charleston, S. C. It was a relief to many people when the Constitution anchored in President Roads, just outside of Boston Harbor, as she had been at sea twenty-two days, and the opposition press had represented her as having been sent to sea without any powder. She and her officers acquired great reputations by this chase and escape, and no doubt her crew gained confidence in their ability to get away from a superior force if necessary. The following notice, which was inserted in the Exchange Coffee-House books by Captain Hull, forms a very fitting termination of this episode : —

“Captain Hull, finding his friends in Boston are correctly informed of his situation when chased by the British squadron off New York, and that they are good enough to give him more credit by escaping them than he ought to claim, takes this opportunity of requesting them to make a transfer of a great part of their good wishes to Lt. Morris, and the other brave officers, and the crew under his command, for their very great exertions and prompt attention to orders while the enemy



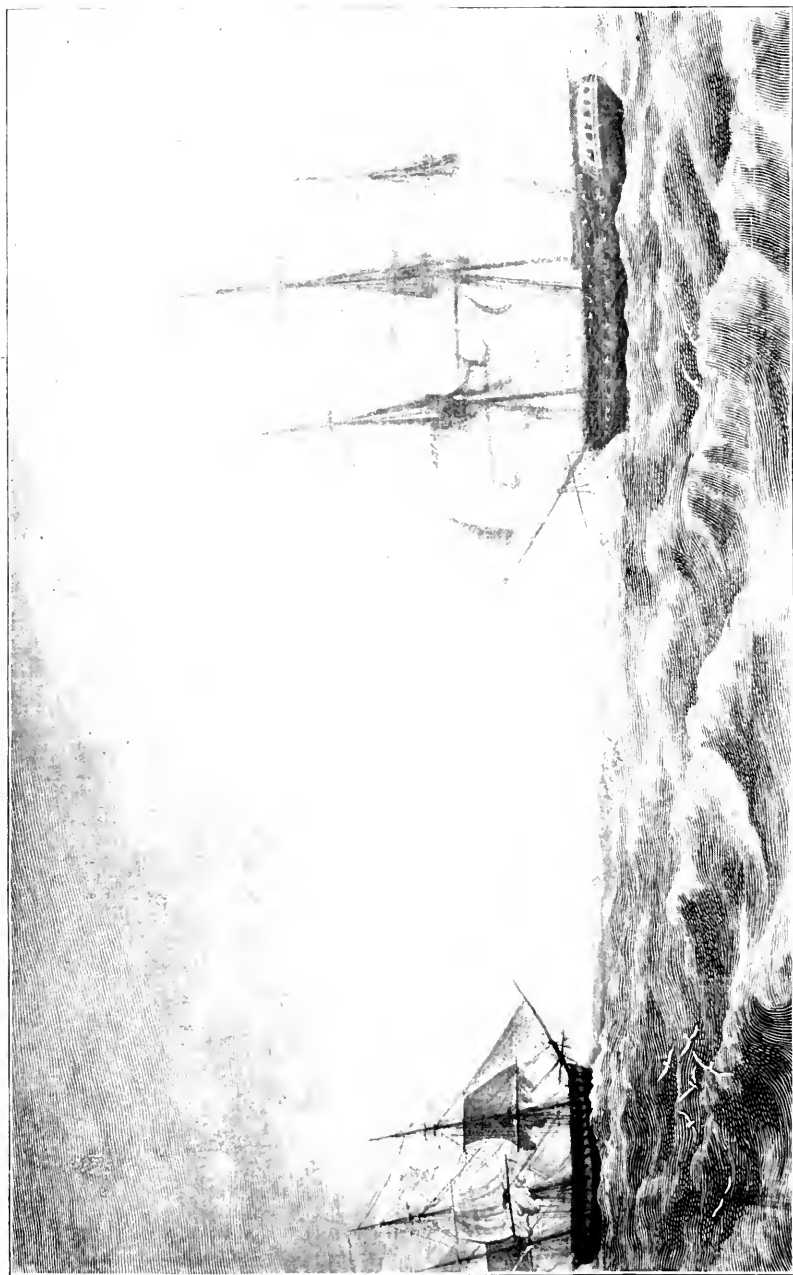
were in chase. Captain Hull has great pleasure in saying, that notwithstanding the length of the chase, and the officers and crew being deprived of sleep, and allowed but little refreshment during the time, not a murmur was heard to escape them."

Captain Hull reported his arrival at Boston to the Navy Department and to the authorities at New York, where he thought Commodore Rodgers might have left orders, but he waited only long enough to hear from New York that no letters had been left for him. He put to sea on August 2, and the next day orders from Washington arrived directing him to wait in Boston for further instructions. He was to have been succeeded by Captain Bainbridge, his senior, exchanging into one of the smaller frigates. Mr. Morris was particularly happy in writing that "the decision of the Captain was fortunate," although Hull might have found himself in an awkward position for sailing without orders had his ship been captured. He was lucky enough to bring back a sufficient excuse. The track of British vessels was well known, as they customarily put into Halifax and the Bermudas for supplies. The triangle formed by joining these two ports with New York seemed likely to contain a number of them, and Captain Hull wished to explore this region before the British could shut him in by the blockade.

## CHAPTER IX

### DESTRUCTION OF THE FRIGATE GUERRIÈRE

THE Constitution stood to the eastward, skirting the coast of Nova Scotia, and then passed leisurely across the entrance to the Gulf of St. Lawrence, to a point near Cape Race, which is supposed to have been sighted on August 15. During this voyage two British merchant-ships were captured and destroyed. The crew was continually exercised at the guns, with the most careful attention to every detail. It must be remembered that they had been on board only six or eight weeks, and were in the enemy's sea. Off Cape Race, five sails were sighted at daylight of the 15th, and a chase developed them into a fleet of four vessels apparently under convoy of a ship of war. As the Constitution overhauled them very rapidly the ship cast off a brig which she had in tow and made sail to windward, leaving the brig in flames. The other vessels were directed to scatter. The first of them overtaken proved to be a British ship on her way home as prize to an American privateer. She



THE CONSTITUTION APPROACHING THE GUERRIÈRE BEFORE THE ACTION



had been spoken by the British fleet, and would undoubtedly have been recaptured if the Constitution had not appeared. A second vessel overhauled and boarded proved to be an American brig with an English prize crew on board. She was released by taking out her prize master and crew and putting on board men taken from the Constitution.

Captain Hull now determined to change his cruising-ground, as he learned from some of the prisoners that the British squadron which had chased his ship off New York was cruising on the Grand Banks quite near him. On August 16, he therefore headed to the southward, and the next day gave chase to a brig, which he found to be the privateer Decatur, of Salem. During the chase, her captain, supposing the Constitution to be a British frigate, had made every effort to escape, and had thrown overboard twelve of his fourteen guns to lighten the ship. His voyage proved peculiarly unfortunate, as he had not made a single capture, and here he had lost his battery to no purpose. He did, however, induce Captain Hull to change his course more to the southward, by telling him that he had sighted a British frigate cruising in that direction on the day before. At two o'clock on the afternoon of the 19th, in latitude  $41^{\circ} 42'$ , longitude  $55^{\circ} 48'$ , a sail was discovered

from the masthead bearing about E. S. E., and the Constitution bore off to intercept her with all sail set and a good breeze on the starboard quarter. One hour later she was made out to be a frigate sailing by the wind on the starboard tack. This ship proved to be the *Guerrière*. She had left the British squadron off New York and was proceeding to Halifax for repairs and equipment.

She maintained her course, and the Constitution approached her rapidly under a fresh breeze. At five o'clock they were about two miles apart. The Constitution took in her light sails, hauled up her courses, got all snug below and ready for action, and beat to quarters. The crew gave three cheers. In the meantime the *Guerrière* had run the British ensign up to each masthead and had backed her mainsail in order to wait for her enemy to come up. At 5.05 she discharged her starboard broadside without hitting anything, then wore around immediately and discharged her port broadside. Two shots took effect, but most of them were too high. The Constitution then hoisted an ensign and a jack at each masthead, and began firing with as many of her bow guns as she could bring to bear. For three quarters of an hour the battle continued in this way, the British ship wearing from time to time to fire a broadside, and the American ship yawing to avoid being raked and to send an

occasional shot from her bow guns. Finding that nothing was accomplished in this way, Captain Hull wore around, set the main topgallant-sail, and headed directly for the enemy, who now bore up with the wind on the port quarter. In this position the two ships were sailing in the

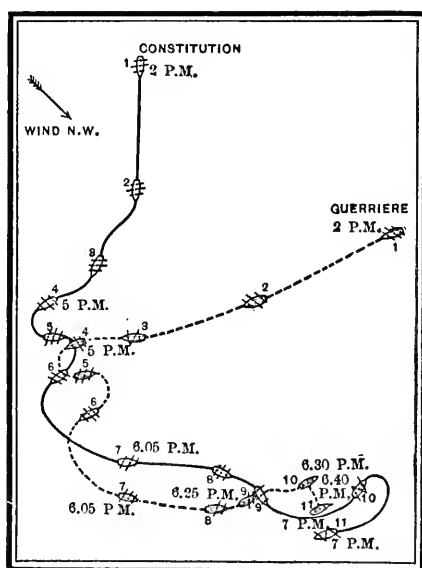


DIAGRAM OF ACTION BETWEEN THE CONSTITUTION AND THE GUERRIÈRE, AUG. 19, 1812. LAT.  $41^{\circ}42'N.$ ; LONG.  $55^{\circ}48'W.$

same direction, with the Constitution overhauling the other on the windward side. She soon closed, and at five minutes after six both ships opened a very heavy fire as the broadside guns began to bear.

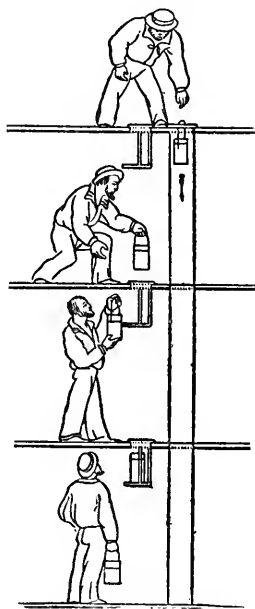
Up to this time, the greater part of the Ameri-

can crew had remained at their quarters, impassive spectators of what was going on, and while they were running up alongside of the *Guerrière* the gunners stood with locked strings in their hands waiting in silence for the order to fire. Several of them were killed beside their guns, and Lieutenant Morris became very impatient to begin firing. Hull restrained him. The situation must have been extremely trying to the men at both the sails and the guns, to be brought thus under a heavy fire without the heartening excitement of striking back. The order came at last, and Hull's good judgment was soon demonstrated. In ten minutes the enemy's mizzen-mast was struck by a carronade shot and fell over the starboard side, knocking a large hole in the counter. In the excitement of the conflict, one of the American sailors exclaimed at this moment, "Damn it, Jack, but we have made a brig of her!" The *Constitution* passed ahead about two hundred yards off the port beam continuing her fire. At twenty minutes past six Captain Hull put the helm hard aport to cross the *Guerrière's* bow and rake her, but many of the braces had been cut away and some of the sails had been disabled, so that the ship did not swing as quickly as he desired. There was time to fire only two raking broadsides, which did fearful execution, before the *Guerrière's* bowsprit and



jib-boom had fouled the lee mizzen rigging of the Constitution. While they were entangled, the Constitution received a shot through her cabin and took fire, but the flames were soon extinguished. The Guerrière's bowsprit offered so convenient a passage for boarding that Mr.

Morris got up on the taffrail to see if the British were collecting for that purpose. He evidently thought they were, and Captain Hull was therefore induced to call away men to repel the boarders. Captain Dacres had actually given the orders to board. Mr. Morris endeavored to pass a lashing around the Guerrière's bowsprit in order to keep her in a disadvantageous position, but he was shot through the body and fell over on the



HANDING UP POWDER

deck. Lieutenant William S. Bush, of the Marines, standing near by, was killed, and Mr. Alwyn was wounded at the same time. The log-book of an officer on the Guerrière states that the wreckage of the fallen mizzen-mast brought the ship up into the wind against her helm (very much as a drag thrown out to leeward would affect a ship under way), and exposed her to a heavy raking fire.

When the Constitution wore around her bow she was practically helpless, and the resulting collision must have weakened her standing rigging; for immediately after they separated, the foremast and mainmast went by the board and left her an unmanageable wreck rolling her main-deck guns under water. At half past six, when even the spritsail yard had gone, the case was hopeless, and Captain Dacres fired a shot to leeward in token of surrender. Captain Hull, seeing that the *Guerrière* was incapable of further resistance, stood off a few ship's-lengths to reeve new braces and examine his ship for injuries, but only a short time was required for this. At seven o'clock, he had come about and placed his ship under the enemy's lee in readiness to continue the fight. Captain Dacres immediately struck his flag. When Lieutenant George C. Read went on board to take possession, he found the spar-deck a horrible spectacle. The masts and yards were hanging over the side, many guns were dismounted, and the bodies of the dead and dying were lying as they had fallen amid the tangle of ropes and rigging. The hull was in a sinking condition, and in some places adjacent port-holes had been knocked into one by the tearing out of intermediate timbers. A report of the ship's condition was sent back to Captain Hull, and his boats were quickly hoisted out to remove the



ACTION BETWEEN THE CONSTITUTION AND THE GUERRIÈRE

30.1.6

prisoners. A surgeon's mate went on board to assist with the wounded.

The crew which surrendered numbered 267. Fifteen had been killed, making a total of 282 men, in all at the beginning of the action. Ten of these were Americans, who had been allowed to go below to spare them from serving against their own countrymen. The battery of the *Guerrière* was composed of thirty long 18-pounders on the gun-deck, and two long 12-pounders, one 18-pound carronade and sixteen 32-pound carronades on the spar-deck, or forty-nine guns in all, firing a broadside of 556 pounds. Her tonnage was 1338, or about eighty-five hundredths of her adversary's.

The *Constitution* carried at this time 456 officers and men. Her battery has been given, but it may be re-stated here for a more ready comparison. There were thirty long 24-pounders on the gun-deck, twenty-two 32-pound carronades on the spar-deck, and two long 24-pounders and one long 18-pounder as bow chasers on the forecastle, in all fifty-five guns with a broadside weighing actually 684 pounds, nominally 736 pounds. She was in every respect, in size, construction, battery and crew, superior to her antagonist; besides, her men were vastly better trained in gunnery, and the ship was handled with greater skill. The *Guerrière* lost 15 killed and 63 wounded, as against 7 killed

and 7 wounded on the American side. One of the latter's killed was accidentally blown from the muzzle of a gun while putting in the powder, because he had not thoroughly sponged out the powder-chamber. There was no comparison in the damage inflicted; one ship was practically destroyed, while the other was ready for another chase a few hours afterwards. Her masts and yards had received a few shots in them, and some of the rigging was carried away. The hull hardly suffered at all. Our ship is said to have obtained her sobriquet, "Old Ironsides," during this fight. A seaman noticed a shot strike the side and fall back into the sea, and shouted, "Huzza, her sides are made of iron!" Sir Howard Douglass says of this battle that the masts of the *Guerrière* had already been crippled by stress of sail and by decay, and that several of the guns and carronades broke loose owing to the perishing condition of their breechings. The decayed state of the timbers permitted the breeching-bolts to pull through the side. He admits, however, that these untoward circumstances and the difference in size and equipment are not sufficient to account for the disparity of loss in killed and wounded. There is testimony, on the other hand, that Captain Dacres thought his ship an uncommonly good representative of her class.

An examination of the *Guerrière* and an attempt at towing demonstrated the impossibility of getting her into port, and Captain Hull gave orders to burn her. All the prisoners were taken out, and Lieutenant Read set fire to her on the afternoon of the 20th. She blew up soon after, and the *Constitution* sailed for Boston, where she arrived on August 30. Captain Dacres had closed his interview with an American frigate wounded and a prisoner of war. He had been so eager to meet one of them, and so confident of the result, that he had written a challenge on the register of the *John Adams*, a merchant-ship out of Liverpool, as follows: —

“Captain Dacres, commander of His Britannic Majesty’s frigate *Guerrière* of forty-four guns, presents his compliments to Commodore Rodgers, of the United States frigate *President*, and will be very happy to meet him or any other American frigate of equal force to the *President* off Sandy Hook, for the purpose of having a few minutes’ tête-a-tête.”

This communication would indicate a vainglorious, swaggering disposition, but Captain Dacres seems to have been a very honorable, conscientious officer. His report to Vice-Admiral Sawyer was to the point and perfectly straightforward, although he did not agree with Captain Hull in some minor particulars. He says of his captors, “I feel it my

duty to state that the conduct of Captain Hull and his officers to our men has been that of a brave enemy; the greatest care being taken to prevent our men losing the smallest trifle and the greatest attention being paid to the wounded."

It is said that just before setting fire to the *Guerrière* Captain Hull asked Captain Dacres if there was anything he would like to save from his ship. He said, "Yes, my mother's Bible, which I have carried with me for years." An officer was sent to get it, and from that moment a friendship sprang up between these two captains that lasted until Hull's death in 1843.

Another story exhibits in a very favorable light the character, not only of Captain Dacres, but also of a Yankee merchant-skipper. An American brig, commanded by Elijah Adams, bound into Boston from the coast of Portugal, was captured by the *Guerrière* not long before the action with the *Constitution*. Her cargo was salt, with silk stowed between decks; and Dacres, after taking out the silk, agreed to ransom her for three or four thousand dollars, if the captain would give his note payable in Halifax. His son, a second Elijah Adams, was left on board as hostage, or guarantee. After the *Constitution* was sighted and her nationality made out, some of the English crew, by way of chaffing the young man, told him



to cheer up, that he would have plenty of company soon. They really believed it, too. He was allowed to go into the cock-pit with other Americans in the crew, where they would be out of danger. They could hear the firing, but could not see it. After the surrender, the youth was transferred to the Constitution with the prisoners, and reached Boston in ten days. His father's ship was a slow sailer, and came jogging up the harbor after dark several days later. The old gentleman reached home in Sudbury Street at midnight, and the front door was opened by his son, the hostage. "Well, where in thunder did you come from?" he exclaimed. The story of the fight was soon told. A day or two afterwards Captain Adams had an interview with Captain Dacres in reference to the status of his bond. He had no thought but to pay it, unless some arrangement could be made on account of the capture of the *Guerrière*. Captain Dacres said, "No, that money belongs to my crew. I will give you my share of it, but I can not relinquish theirs. I must take care of my boys." The old captain was a poor man, but he made no attempt to evade the responsibility, and paid his note on that basis.<sup>1</sup> Some parts of young Adams's story are

<sup>1</sup> The story of this bond was told to the writer by Mr. William Lincoln in his ninety-third year, from personal recollections of Elijah Adams, the son.

omitted, as they are only repetitions of what appears in the following extract from the private journal of Captain William B. Orne, published for the first time in Coggeshall's "History of the American Privateers."

"I commanded the American brig *Betsey*, in the year 1812, and was returning home from Naples, Italy, to Boston. When near the western edge of the Grand Bank of Newfoundland, on the 10th of August, 1812, I fell in with the British frigate *Guerrière*, Captain Dacres, and was captured by him. Myself and a boy were taken on board of the frigate; the remainder of my officers and men were left in the *Betsey*, and sent into Halifax, N. S., as a prize to the *Guerrière*. On the 19th of the same month, when in latitude  $41^{\circ} 41'$  North, longitude about  $55^{\circ} 40'$  West, the wind being fresh from the northward, the *Guerrière* was under double-reefed topsails during all the forenoon of this day. At two P. M., we discovered a large sail to windward, bearing about North from us. We soon made her out to be a frigate. She was steering off from the wind, with her head to the Southwest, evidently with the intention of cutting us off as soon as possible. Signals were soon made by the *Guerrière*, but as they were not answered, the conclusion of course was, that she was either a French or an American frigate. Captain Dacres appeared anxious to ascertain her character, and after looking at her for that purpose, handed me his spy-glass, requesting me to give him my opinion of the

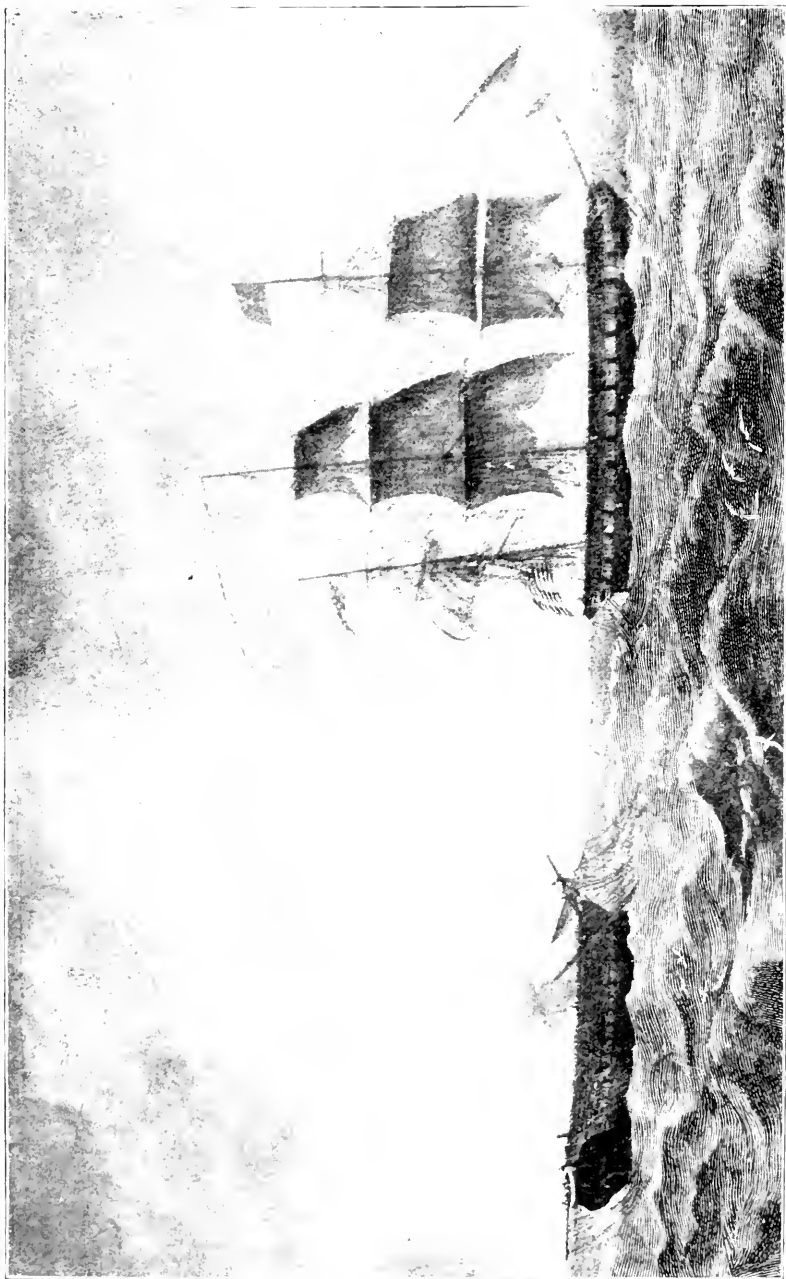
stranger. I soon saw from the peculiarity of her sails, and from her general appearance, that she was, without doubt, an American frigate, and communicated the same to Captain Dacres. He immediately replied, that he thought she came down too boldly for an American, but soon after added: 'The better he behaves, the more honor we shall gain by taking him.'

The two ships were rapidly approaching each other, when the *Guerrière* backed her main-topsail, and waited for her opponent to come down, and commence the action. He then set an English flag at each mast-head, beat to quarters, and made ready for the fight. When the strange frigate came down to within two or three miles distance, he hauled upon the wind, took in all his light sails, reefed his topsails, and deliberately prepared for action. It was now about five o'clock in the afternoon, when he filled away and ran down for the *Guerrière*. At this moment Captain Dacres politely said to me: 'Captain Orne, as I suppose you do not wish to fight against your own countrymen, you are at liberty to go below the water-line.' It was not long after this before I retired from the quarter-deck to the cock-pit; of course I saw no more of the action until the firing ceased, but I heard and felt much of its effects; for soon after I left the deck, the firing commenced on board the *Guerrière*, and was kept up almost incessantly until about six o'clock, when I heard a tremendous explosion from the opposing frigate. The effect of her shot seemed to make the *Guerrière* reel, and tremble as though she had received the shock of an earthquake.

Immediately after this, I heard a tremendous crash on deck, and was told the mizzen-mast was shot away. In a few moments afterward, the cock-pit was filled with wounded men. At about half-past six o'clock in the evening, after the firing had ceased, I went on deck, and there beheld a scene which it would be difficult to describe ; all the *Guerrière's* masts were shot away, and as she had no sails to steady her, she lay rolling like a log in the trough of the sea. Many of the men were employed in throwing the dead overboard. The decks were covered with blood, and had the appearance of a butcher's slaughter-house ; the gun tackles were not made fast, and several of the guns got loose, and were surging to and fro from one side to the other.

“Some of the petty officers and seamen, after the action, got liquor, and were intoxicated ; and what with the groans of the wounded, the noise and confusion of the enraged survivors of the ill-fated ship rendered the whole scene a perfect hell.”

This fight, one of the most dramatic in our history, both in its action and in its immediate effect upon the country, supplied the periodicals with many stories which have been told and retold to generations of our youth. Naturally, every man in a crew of 461 would have some individual experience to relate which lost nothing in the telling. The time of enlistment ran out, the men scattered to other ships, and the tales of the “*Old Constitution*” which within a generation became current



ACTION BETWEEN THE CONSTITUTION AND THE GUERRIÈRE (THE END)



throughout the service would fill volumes. They differ more or less in detail, and some would not now be recognized by their own parents; yet they all agree in representing Hull as a fearless and magnanimous commander. His skill and coolness in handling a ship became proverbial, and his crew had absolute confidence in him. It is said that when Captain Dacres was climbing up the side of the *Constitution*, Hull went to meet him, and reaching out his hand said, as to an old friend, "Dacres, give me your hand, I know you are hurt."

One incident connected with the action is well authenticated. The flag at the foretopgallant masthead was shot away, and an Irish lad, Daniel Hogan, climbed up and lashed it in place. He afterwards had his hand badly lacerated in the action with the *Java* by the lead flying from the scupper through which a shot passed, and in 1844 applied for admission to the Naval Asylum for aged seamen.

In order to comprehend the exultation over this victory, it is necessary only to consider the state of the country, and especially the discouragement of the port from which the *Constitution* had sailed. The summer of 1812 had presented a gloomy outlook. Incompetence reigned on land, and the campaign against upper Canada had proved an utter failure. General Hull's surrender on land occurred

only a few days before Captain Hull's triumph on the sea. Nothing was expected of the Navy. Many merchant-ships were shut up in Boston, and trade was dead. The open talk of secession and the dismal prediction of disaster served only to intensify the gloom. The appearance of the Constitution was like a bright gleam in the darkness. We were not absolutely impotent after all, even against the greatest sea-power of the world, and ship for ship we had nothing to fear. The charm was broken. Here was something over which all sections alike could rejoice, in which all parties could unite, and which belonged to the country as a whole. It is small wonder that some people seemed to have gone mad.

Captain Hull and his officers were received with open arms. A dinner in their honor was given at Faneuil Hall on September 5. They were marched up State Street in a procession with many of Boston's leading citizens of both political parties, and thousands lined the sidewalks to see them. The repast was what the Palladium called an "excellent dinner." It must have been interminable, for seventeen toasts were drunk. From these the following have been selected as an evidence of the turn given to public opinion : —

"The American Nation — May danger from abroad insure union at home."



“Our Infant Navy — We must nurture the young Hercules in his cradle, if we mean to profit by the labors of his manhood.”

“The Victory we celebrate — An invaluable proof that we are able to defend our rights on the ocean.”

“No Entangling Alliance — We have suffered the injuries and insults of despotism with patience, but its friendship is more than we can bear.”

A more substantial reward took the shape of fifty thousand dollars prize money voted by Congress for the officers and men, a gold medal commemorating the action for Captain Hull and silver medals for the other officers. Some of them received swords from their native States.

The surprise and gloom produced in England over the disaster to their arms was equaled only by the inability to explain it. One English newspaper reached this conclusion: “From it the theory may be drawn that a contest with the Americans is more worthy of our arms than we at first sight imagined.” The London Times added: “It is not merely that an English frigate has been taken after what we are free to confess may be called a brave resistance, but that it has been taken by a new enemy, — an enemy unaccustomed to such triumphs, and likely to be rendered confident by them. He must be a weak politician who does not see how important the first triumph is in giving a

tone and character to the war." When other victories followed, the despair of the British nation over the loss of a few ships was pitiful. They simply could not understand that they were fighting against people of the same blood and sea traditions, who had acquired extraordinary readiness and resource by nearly two centuries of warfare against the wilderness. Their newspapers and even their naval historian, James, could not find words vile enough to describe us, and reference to our frigates as "manned by a handful of bastards and outlaws" seemed to express their measure of contempt. Our people were not slow to retaliate, and we have no cause to look back with pride upon the average newspaper articles of the day. Their language was boastful and often abusive.

The first anchorage of the Constitution upon her arrival at Boston was about one and a half miles southeast of Boston Light, and a few hours later she moved into Nantasket Roads. Early the next day a fleet of five ships appeared outside, and Captain Hull, fearing the English, slipped the cables in his haste to avoid being cut off from the entrance to the harbor; but a few hours later the ships were discovered to be Commodore Rodgers's squadron. The Constitution was taken in, however, and anchored near Long Wharf in order to parole and transfer the prisoners.



HULL MEDAL



On September 3, Commodore Rodgers called for volunteers to go out in the President to meet some British ships reported on the coast, and sixty men at once responded from the Constitution; but the report turned out to be false, and the men were returned three days later. A change of commanders was now to be made, and the ship was moved up to the Navy Yard for some overhauling preparatory to hoisting the broad pennant of Commodore William Bainbridge as flagship of a small squadron. He took command on September 15, and the crew expressed their dissatisfaction so openly that a number of them were sent out of the ship for mutinous behavior. The removal of Captain Hull was in no sense a reflection upon him. He had commanded his ship for two years, and now he voluntarily gave up in order that Bainbridge might have an opportunity. The next six weeks were spent in refitting and taking in stores.

The officers detailed to the ship for this cruise were:—

*Captain*, William Bainbridge.

*Lieutenants*, George Parker, Beekman V. Hoffman, John T. Shubrick, Charles W. Morgan, and John C. Alwyn.

*Sailing-master*, John Nichols.

*Midshipmen*, Thomas A. Beatty, Lewis German, William L. Gordon, Ambrose D. Field, Frederick Baury,

Joseph Cross, John A. Belcher, William V. Taylor, Alexander Eskridge, James W. Delancy, James Greenlaw, William D. McCarty, Z. W. Nixon, John A. Wish, Dulaney Forrest, George H. Leverett, Henry Ward, John C. Long, John Packett, Richard Winter, and John C. Cummings.

*Chaplain*, John Carleton.

*Surgeon*, Amos A. Evans.

*Surgeon's Mates*, Donaldson Yeates and John D. Armstrong.

*Purser*, Robert C. Ludlow.

*Lieutenants of Marines*, John Contee and William H. Freeman.

## CHAPTER X

### DESTRUCTION OF THE JAVA — CRUISE UNDER STEWART

CAPTAIN BAINBRIDGE got to sea on October 27 in company with the *Hornet*, expecting to meet the *Essex* in the South Atlantic, where they were to cruise in squadron looking for British East India-men. He stopped at the Island Ferdinando de Noronha for fresh water, and left a letter addressed to an alias for Captain David Porter of the *Essex*. This ship may be dismissed with the statement that Captain Porter obtained this letter about the middle of December and proceeded to Cape Frio, the rendezvous appointed, but missed the other ships. He cruised along the coast looking for them another month and finally determined to shift for himself. This was the beginning of his historic cruise in the Pacific.

In the meantime, the *Constitution* and the *Hornet* had arrived off San Salvador on the 13th of December. The voyage would have been uneventful but for constant trouble with the crew. The

log contains records of many punishments. Bainbridge does not appear to have been popular with his men, at least not until after the meeting with the Java. The Hornet was sent inside of the port to communicate with the American consul and to arrange for getting some stores. She found the British sloop-of-war Bonne Citoyenne at anchor and about to sail for England. Captain Lawrence of the Hornet conceived a hope of capturing her, and he went outside to await her sailing. In two weeks his patience gave out, and he sent a challenge to the Englishman to come out and fight him. The two ships carried the same number of guns and were otherwise equal, but, as the Bonne Citoyenne had on board a quantity of specie, her captain declined. It would seem at the present time that he was perfectly right. The most humane theory of war is to overpower the enemy with superior force or to out-manceuvre him, and not to fight with precisely equal forces except as a last resort. War should not be a series of carefully arranged duels on precisely equal terms. The correspondence was carried on through the consuls of the two countries, and Bainbridge offered to pledge himself not to interfere in any way between the combatants. It is difficult in these days to see how an American commodore was justified in entering any such compact. The presence of the two ships off the port



gave rise to considerable correspondence between the consul and the governor of the province, who conceived the neutrality violated by the *Hornet's* entering the port and subsequently establishing

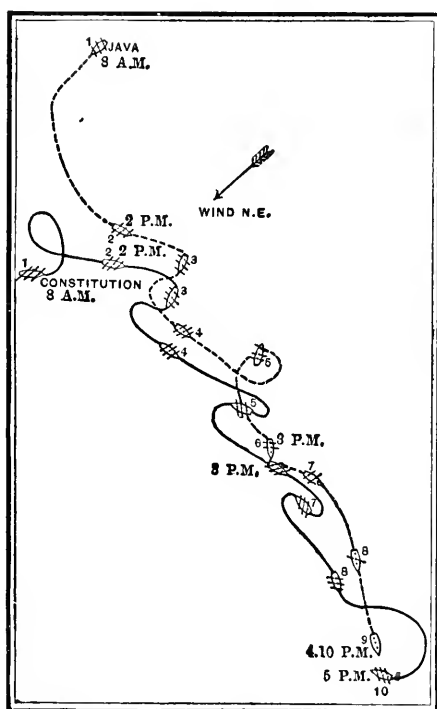


DIAGRAM OF ACTION BETWEEN THE CONSTITUTION AND THE  
JAVA, DEC. 29, 1812. LAT.  $13^{\circ} 6' S.$  ; LONG.  $3^{\circ} W.$

what amounted to a blockade. He claimed that the presence of hostile ships cruising near the coast gave great dissatisfaction to his people.

At the time of the challenge, as if to give proof of his disinterestedness, Commodore Bainbridge

left the *Hornet* to watch the *Bonne Citoyenne*, and sailed for a cruise off the coast, with the evident intention of picking up anything bound into San Salvador. At nine o'clock on the morning of December 29, about thirty miles east of that port, two sails were sighted rather inshore to the northward. They were coming down before the wind, which was blowing from the N. E. The *Constitution* was heading offshore on the port tack. An hour later the two sails were made out to be two ships, one of them standing towards the shore and the other, a large frigate, heading directly for the *Constitution*. Captain Bainbridge tacked to the northward and westward to get a better look at her, and judging her to be a British ship, he came about once more to draw her offshore and away from her consort. The private signals which he hoisted were not answered, and the other ship was flying signals which he could not make out. They continued on parallel courses to the eastward for nearly two hours, the British gradually overhauling the "chase," as they call the *Constitution* in their reports. This ship was the *Java*, a 38-gun frigate, bound from Spithead to the East Indies, and her companion was the American merchant-ship *William*, captured a few days before, and recaptured subsequently inshore by the *Hornet*. Shortly after noon both frigates ran up their

colors, the Constitution flying national flags at the mizzen peak and the main topgallant masthead, and a jack at the foremast, while the Java flew her ensign at the mizzen peak, a union jack at the mizzen topgallant masthead, and another union jack lashed to the main rigging.

At half past one, Bainbridge had gained what he considered a sufficient distance from the shore, and his ship was thereupon headed for the Java. Twenty minutes later she wore around to avoid being raked and steered a course to the southward as close on the port tack as she could sail. The Java was on the same course, but well to windward, occupying almost exactly the same position relatively to the Constitution that the latter had occupied towards the *Guerrière* at the beginning of the earlier engagement. At two o'clock, both ships having shortened sail and cleared for action, Captain Bainbridge fired a shot across the bow of the Java, then about half a mile to windward, and immediately afterwards he fired a whole broadside, which did little damage. A general action ensued, both ships manœuvring for advantageous positions. They were a little too far apart for the 18-pounders of the British ship, and she probably tried to close in order to use her carronades more effectively, while the Constitution seems to have maintained a judicious distance until her opponent

had been seriously weakened at long range. There is some conflict of testimony on this point. Lieutenant Chads states in his report of the fight that both ships "maneuvered to obtain advantageous positions, our opponent evidently avoiding close action and firing high to disable our masts, in which she succeeded too well." Captain Bainbridge, on the other hand, writes, "A general action with round and grape then commenced; the enemy keeping at a much greater distance than I wished; but could not bring him to a close action without exposing ourselves to several rakes." The Java being the faster ship attempted three times to pass around her adversary's bow for raking, but Commodore Bainbridge avoided him by firing a broadside and quickly wearing around on the other tack under cover of the smoke. The ships were extremely well handled on both sides. The British commander, Captain Henry Lambert, had the disadvantage of losing his bowsprit and jib-boom about an hour after the beginning of the action, and from that time on he seems to have felt that desperate measures were needed; for he ordered his ship to be laid on board. This manœuvre was attended with failure and with fatal results in the loss of his foremast, although the ships were actually in contact at one time. Soon after the attempt Captain Lambert fell mortally wounded

by a shot from the maintop of the Constitution. The musketry of the Americans posted in the tops was very effective, and the British lost many men by it. On the other hand, the marksmanship of the Java's crew was exceedingly poor, as they inflicted little damage after the first broadside. This broadside had nevertheless been very destructive to the Constitution's men. Later in the action her wheel was carried away, but too late to affect the result.

Commodore Bainbridge tells the story of the latter half of the fight in a few sentences of his journal. "At forty minutes past two, determined to close with the enemy notwithstanding his raking. Set the fore and mainsail and luffed up close to him. At fifty minutes past two the enemy's jib-boom got foul of our mizzen rigging. At three the head of the enemy's bowsprit and jib-boom were shot away by us. At five minutes past three, shot away the enemy's foremast by the board. At fifteen minutes past three, shot away his main topmast just above the cap. At forty minutes past three, shot away the gaff and spanker boom. At fifty-five minutes past three shot away his mizzenmast nearly by the board." This reads almost like target practice. In less than an hour he had cut off every stick of timber in the ship excepting part of the mainmast. Few of the Java's guns could be handled on account of the wreckage.

At five minutes past four the Java had been dismasted, her fire completely silenced, and her flag shot away. Captain Bainbridge therefore hauled ahead to repair rigging and examine his ship for injuries. Forty-five minutes later he wore around and stationed himself on his opponent's bows. In the mean time, Lieutenant Henry D. Chads, who had succeeded to the command, was making every effort to get the Java in a condition to continue the fight. He had run up a flag, had set a sail on the stump of the foremast and bowsprit, and had cleared the wreckage away from some of the guns; but it was all in vain. The heavy rolling of the ship carried away the remains of the mainmast and hampered him with some more rigging to clear off. Seeing that the case was hopeless, he surrendered at half past five, and Lieutenant Parker was sent on board to take possession. The action had lasted something over two hours and the Java suffered the same fate as the *Guerrière*. Both were complete wrecks. These two ships had the same battery and were intended for similar crews, but the Java was carrying enough additional men as passengers to bring her total up to either 377 or 426. There is much conflicting testimony on this subject and on her casualties.

The Constitution lost, including three who subsequently died, twelve killed and twenty-two

wounded, the commanding officer being among the latter. He remained on deck late into the night notwithstanding two very painful wounds. Lieutenant John C. Alwyn died one month later of his injuries. The probable loss of the Java was forty-eight killed and one hundred and two wounded. Lieutenant Chads reported only twenty-two killed, but a letter from another officer was discovered giving the number as sixty. It is quite likely that only twenty-two were killed outright, and that many died of their wounds soon after the battle. Although the Constitution was the superior in every respect, and suffered somewhat in her rigging and masts, there was no comparison in the relative injury sustained by the two sides. One ship was destroyed, and the other was equal to a long voyage home without laying up for repairs.

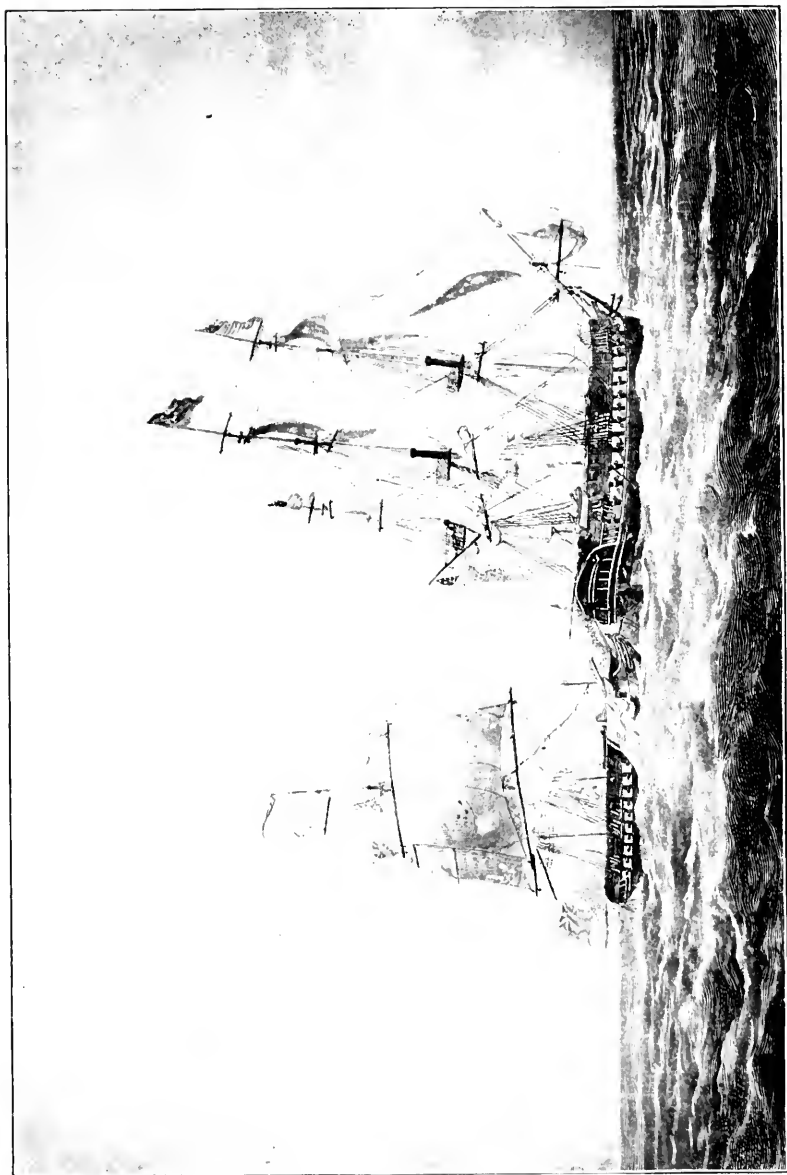
As stated before, the Java was on her way to India with a number of extra men for distribution in the fleet, besides Lieutenant General Hislop, newly appointed Governor of Bombay, and his staff. They all rendered service in some capacity. The gallantry and desperation with which their ship was fought is shown by her condition after surrender. She was not fit to make a voyage to the United States, and Bainbridge did not like to take her into San Salvador, whose governor was decidedly unfriendly to the American cause. He

therefore concluded to destroy her. Only one of the small boats survived the contest, fit for service, so that the removal of the prisoners and their baggage was very tedious. No attempt was made to take out the valuable stores intended for Bombay, but the wheel was removed and fitted on the Constitution to replace the one which had been shot away. Two days after the fight the Americans set fire to the Java, and she soon blew up.

Both crews fought well in this action, and there are several recorded instances of enthusiasm for the flag even in the very presence of death. A seaman on the Constitution, John Cheever by name, was lying desperately wounded by the side of a dead comrade. When he heard the words, "The enemy has struck!" he raised himself on one hand, gave three cheers, and fell back dead.

In the proceedings of the court-martial to try the surviving officers and crew of the Java, the following testimony from James Humble, the boatswain, is interesting. "I was down about an hour, when I got my arm put a little to rights by a tourniquet being put on it — nothing else ; my hand was carried away and my arm wounded about the elbow. I put my arm into the bosom of my shirt, and went up again, when I saw the enemy ahead of us repairing his damages. I had my orders from Lieutenant Chads, before the action began, to cheer up the boarders with my pipe."





ACTION BETWEEN THE CONSTITUTION AND THE JAVA (AFTER ONE HOUR)



A story bearing on this battle is told of Mr. Chads, years afterwards an admiral in the British Navy, by Mr. B. F. Stevens, who served on the *Constitution* in China. In 1845, she went to Singapore with a sick list of two hundred, and the first man to welcome her with offers of medical assistance was Commodore Chads of the British squadron. He remarked to Captain Percival, her commander, "The *Constitution* in her battle with the Java was manœuvred in a masterly manner, and it made me regret that she was not British."

The *Constitution* anchored in San Salvador on January 2, 1813, to land the prisoners on parole. General Hislop presented Commodore Bainbridge with a gold-mounted sword as an evidence of his gratitude for the kindness and consideration with which he had been treated, and Lieutenant Chads in his report to the British Admiralty made "grateful acknowledgement for the generous treatment Captain Lambert and his officers have experienced from our gallant enemy, Commodore Bainbridge and his officers." When Captain Lambert was carried out of the ship to die on shore, Bainbridge, suffering from his wounds, came on deck supported by two officers to bid him farewell and return his sword. The contrast at that time between the dignified, magnanimous bearing of the participants in this action and the tone of the writers who subsequently described them is very striking.

On January 6 the Constitution sailed for home, leaving the Bonne Citoyenne still bottled up by the Hornet. Commodore Bainbridge left orders for the latter to remain on the coast as long as Captain Lawrence deemed it necessary, but warned him not to let the British line-of-battle-ship Montague catch him there. As a matter of fact, she did chase him into the harbor nearly three weeks later, and he escaped by night. On his way home he captured the British brig Peacock.

The Constitution reached Boston on the last day of February, and Bainbridge landed next day, saluted by the cheers of his countrymen. Another procession of prominent citizens marched up the street, and another dinner was given in honor of the Constitution's victory. The Congress of the United States passed a vote of thanks and ordered the usual gold and silver medals to be struck off commemorating the action; even the Commonwealth of Massachusetts waxed jubilant over the triumph of our arms. Bainbridge became a hero, and later when he went to Washington the citizens of every town turned out to honor him. He found time, however, to write a letter concerning the prize money for his officers and crew. The sum appropriated as prize money for the total destruction of the *Guerrière* had not yet been paid, as they had gone to sea before the order reached Boston;

and now an additional \$50,000 was appropriated for the destruction of the Java. Through Commodore Bainbridge's efforts, both sums were paid over to the men within six weeks after they arrived in port.

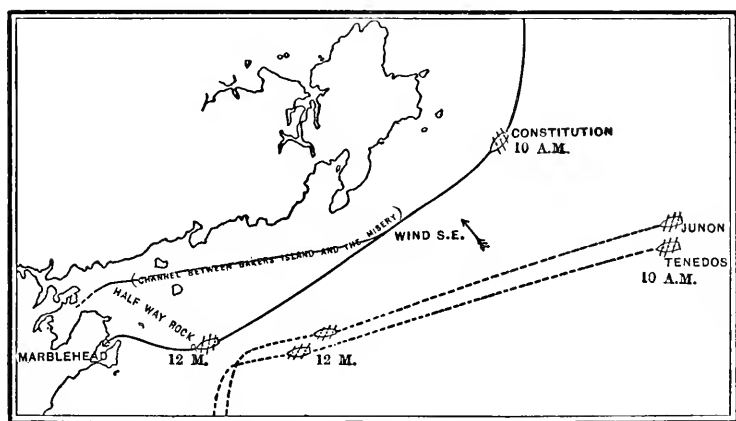
If the loss of the *Guerrière* took the English by surprise, the capture of the Java carried consternation to their hearts. She was the third frigate lost to the Americans in five months. Orders were issued immediately that no frigate armed with 18-pounders should engage a frigate of 24-pounders, if the action could be avoided; a very different state of mind from that which expected to "annihilate the contemptible Navy of the United States and sweep the American flag from the sea within a few months." Line-of-battle-ships were cut down to frigates and sent over to our coast, and the British squadron was largely reinforced. Added to the above, our position in Europe was vastly improved.

These victories served another purpose for the time being. They stimulated Congress to renewed interest in the Navy, as our people began to see where their surest defense lay. It was too late; but early in January, 1813, Congress passed a bill authorizing four line-of-battle ships and six additional frigates. None of these got to sea before peace was declared, and in the mean time our small

force was gradually expending itself upon its powerful opponent. Towards the end of the war it became difficult for our few frigates to get to sea, so closely was the blockade pressed.

Soon after her arrival in Boston, the Constitution went up to the Navy Yard for a thorough overhauling. Some of the timbers were rotting, and the engagement with the Java had weakened the masts. Commodore Bainbridge was transferred to the Yard early in the spring, and Captain Charles Stewart succeeded to the command. A new crew was shipped late in the fall of 1813, and almost a complete change was made in the list of officers. This crew was composed with few exceptions of New England men. Old Ironsides had become very popular, as she was now looked upon as a lucky ship, so that there was no longer trouble in getting men to enlist for her. Captain Stewart sailed on the last day of the year for a cruise to the southward and eastward. He was in latitude  $10^{\circ} 39'$ , longitude  $40^{\circ} 50' W.$ , on January 26, looking for East Indiamen. Thence he skirted the Guiana coast to the Windward Islands. In the middle of January he captured and destroyed the British 14-gun schooner Pictou, carrying a crew of seventy-five men. Nine days later the British frigate Pique, 36 guns, was chased through the Mona passage. She escaped during the night.

Her captain had strict orders to avoid an unequal contest, and his ship was certainly inferior to the Constitution. This cruise was filled with disappointment to the men, as they were constantly sighting and chasing ships only to find them American merchantmen; but they managed to capture



CHASE OF THE CONSTITUTION INTO MARBLEHEAD HARBOR

several prizes in the West Indies on their way home. The voyage ended on April 2, when the ship sighted the Portsmouth light. There another surprise and narrow escape awaited them.

Early on the morning of the 3d they were heading for Portsmouth, but at sunrise the wind shifted to the northeast and it was found necessary to head around for Boston. By eight o'clock, the wind had hauled around to the N. N. W. and had almost died out, when suddenly two square-rigged vessels

were sighted to the E. S. E. apparently coming up before a fresh breeze. They were soon made out to be men-of-war, and there was little doubt about their nationality. Captain Stewart was now in a very trying position. He had every stitch of canvas spread to catch the faintest breath of air, and he lay fully an hour becalmed about three miles southeast of Thacher's Island. At ten o'clock he got the breeze from the southeast, when the two ships, the British 38-gun frigates *Tenedos* and *Junon*, were only three and a half miles away directly to the windward. There was nobody on board the *Constitution* who knew the channel between Baker's Island and the Misery, otherwise Captain Stewart could have reached a place of safety at once by heading directly for Salem; but as he had no pilot, he held to the course which he knew had plenty of water and which carried him around Halfway Rock at the risk of being cut off. Shortly after ten o'clock he ordered spare spars, provisions, and some prize goods thrown overboard. Then the water was started and pumped out. Finally, finding that the ship was too much by the stern and was only just holding her own, he started the spirits in the spirit-room to bring her to her best sailing trim. It is an odd commentary on the old Navy that a frigate carried enough whiskey to make a decided difference in her draught. The

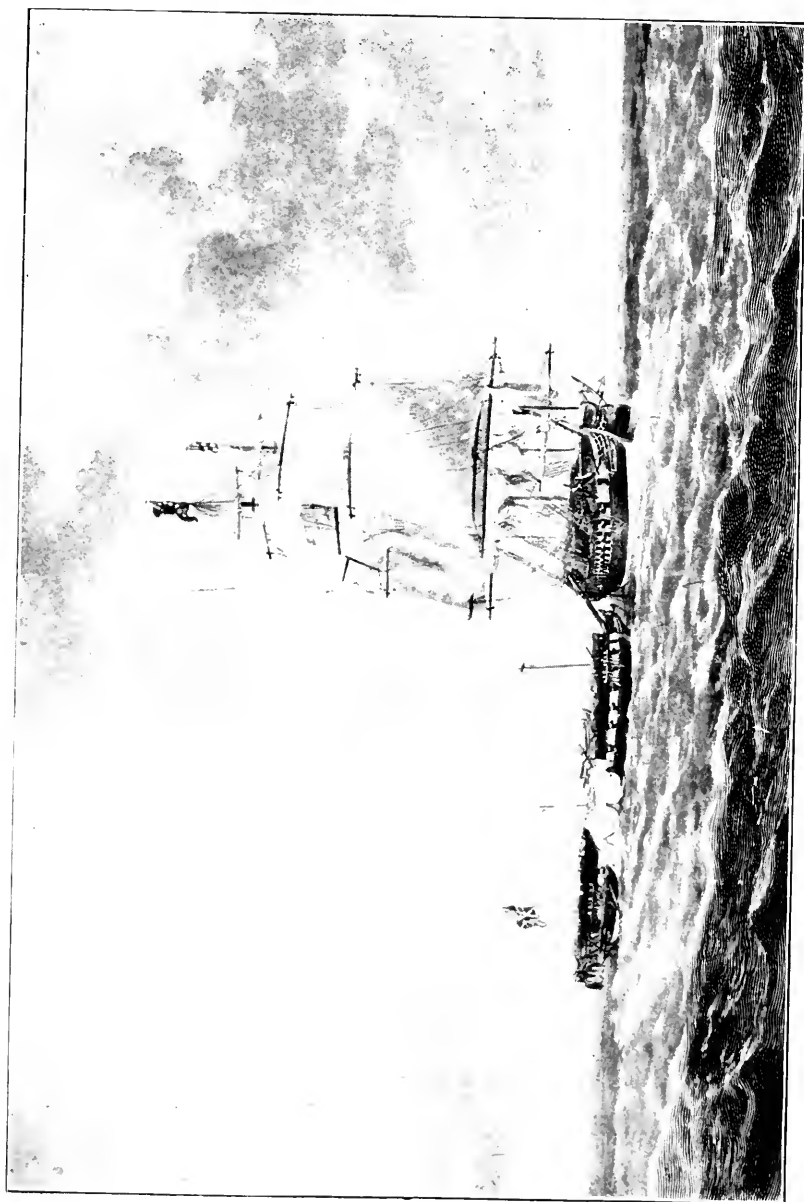


sacrifice proved effectual; for by noon she had rounded Halfway Rock and squared away for Marblehead. From this time on our old ship gained, and by one o'clock she was safely at anchor under the guns of Fort Sewall, with the Tenedos and Junon lying six miles outside. The militia was summoned from every town along the coast to help defend her, but the enemy sailed away in the afternoon, and Captain Stewart moved into Salem harbor at high water. He remarked to the pilot, Captain Knott Martin, who took the ship over to Salem, "I could have saved \$10,000 if I had had you on board this morning, as I had to throw overboard that amount in prize goods."

A few days later the Constitution slipped into Boston harbor and was shut in for eight and a half months. By the end of 1813, the British had ceased to deal tenderly with New England, whose loyalty to the Union they had at first suspected. When it became evident that the project of bringing about a separation through Canadian agents had failed utterly, the blockade was at once tightly drawn about the whole coast. Other frigates were in like case with the Constitution. The Constellation was held in Norfolk, and the United States in New London, until the end of the war. The only possibility of getting out was during a gale of wind, and Captain Stewart did not obtain this

opportunity until the winter months increased the hardships and difficulties before the English sailors.

The citizens of Boston were very much alarmed over a threatened attack upon the principal sea-ports of New England, particularly as the stores and ships at the Navy Yard presented strong incentives to the British squadron. Commodore Bainbridge made every possible provision for defense. The Independence, a line-of-battle-ship just launched, was armed with a few guns and so anchored near the Constitution as to cover the channel into the harbor. Several batteries were erected on the shore to the same end. The militia of Boston and Charlestown volunteered their services, and preparations were made for a vigorous defense. When the enemy really appeared outside, the Commodore wrote a letter to the adjutant-general of the State requesting his coöperation, and failing to stir up much activity on the part of the state authorities, he wrote a second time. A committee appointed by the governor suggested that, as the ships were the principal object of attack, they should be moved below Fort Warren where the enemy could get at them without the risk of destroying any part of Boston or Charlestown. This was positively refused, as it meant the removal of our ships from the support of the land batteries. Not even the corsairs had been willing



ACTION BETWEEN THE CONSTITUTION AND THE JAVA (NEAR THE END)



to sacrifice their ships in that way. The old Constitution was probably saved once more by the firmness of Commodore Bainbridge. He never questioned the bravery and patriotism of the Boston people, but he attributed their blindness to the support of party rather than of the nation. Subsequently, when the danger became even more threatening, a few public-spirited men of both parties succeeded in securing the cordial assistance of the State, and such measures were adopted as to render the entrance to the harbor very dangerous. The British squadron prudently drew off the coast at the approach of winter.

It is only fair to say that while the Massachusetts people were immensely proud of their ship, the relation of the state troops to the Federal authorities was not well understood. The governor conceded that the President had power to call out and command the militia when it was necessary "to execute the laws of the Union, suppress insurrection, and to repel invasion," but in his opinion these exigencies had not arisen. The confusion over the defense of Boston harbor turned, therefore, upon the question of the President's right to decide when the occasion had arisen for the exercise of the authority given to him by the constitution.

## CHAPTER XI

### CAPTURE OF THE CYANE AND LEVANT

THE absence of the British finally gave the Constitution a clear passage to sea. In December, the blockading force consisted of the 50-gun frigate Newcastle, built expressly for use against the American 44-gun frigates, the 40-gun frigate Acasta, and the 18-gun brig sloop Arab. On the 12th, the Newcastle was off the entrance to Boston harbor, and discovered that the Constitution was ready for sea. She proceeded at once to Cape Cod Bay, for some unexplained reason, and met the Acasta on the 16th. This left Boston Roads comparatively open, and having no doubt received information of the whereabouts of the British ships, Captain Stewart was not slow to take advantage of his opportunity. He put to sea on December 18, and succeeded in getting entirely clear of the land without molestation.

The senior officers on board at this time were : —

*Captain*, Charles Stewart.

*Lieutenants*, Henry Ballard, Beekman V. Hoffman,

William B. Shubrick, William M. Hunter, Richard Winter, and William V. Taylor.

*Sailing-master*, Samuel C. Hixon.

*Captain of Marines*, Archibald Henderson.

The ship was headed for another cruise to the southeast. Eight days out, near the Bermudas, she overhauled the British merchant-ship, Lord Nelson, parted from her convoy, in distress, and placed a prize crew on board of her.

The log for Christmas day gives the fate of this little vessel in the following brief record:—

Sunday, December 25. — Changed the officer in the prize brig — she not keeping sufficiently near; afterwards took her in tow and sent people on board to break out the hold and remove such things as might be useful to the Constitution. Sent Lieut. Taylor on board with orders to cut away her masts. Through some misconception of his orders, he scuttled her. Latitude 33° 32' N. Longitude 59° 16' W.

In the early part of February they were cruising off the coast of Portugal, having visited the neighborhood of the Madeiras and the Bay of Biscay in the interval. On the 8th, Captain Stewart spoke the barque Julia, fifteen days out from Cork, under Hamburg colors, and learned that peace had been signed at Ghent. This report was corroborated later on the same day, as stated by the ship's log.

At four o'clock a boat was sent to board "a Russian brig from Kinsale bound to Amelia Island, out fifteen days. Two American masters of vessels, passengers, came on board and brought papers which confirmed the report of peace having been concluded at Ghent between the commissioners."

Such news did not dampen the ardor of our seamen for one more good fight, and the ship headed leisurely down the coast in search of a proper antagonist; but they were doomed to disappointment in that locality. A British merchant-ship was picked up on the 17th, and sent home as a prize. Still the officers and men suffered great discouragement over their failure to repeat the former triumph of "Old Ironsides," and it was with extreme dejection that they saw the cruise ending without an important capture. By one of those curious fancies which sometimes strike men, Captain Stewart one morning assured them that they would meet the enemy before sunset the next day. He headed for the Madeiras once more, and, strange to relate, his prediction was fulfilled.

On the afternoon of February 20, at one o'clock, a sail was sighted two points off the port bow. A light haze had settled down over the water, and objects could not readily be made out. The Constitution was in latitude  $33^{\circ} 44'$  N., and longitude  $14^{\circ} 39'$  W., on a course between south and south-





BAINBRIDGE MEDAL



west, with a moderate breeze from the northeast. She immediately gave chase, and soon brought a large ship into plain view. Shortly afterwards, another sail was discovered somewhat to the westward of the first. Both were standing to the

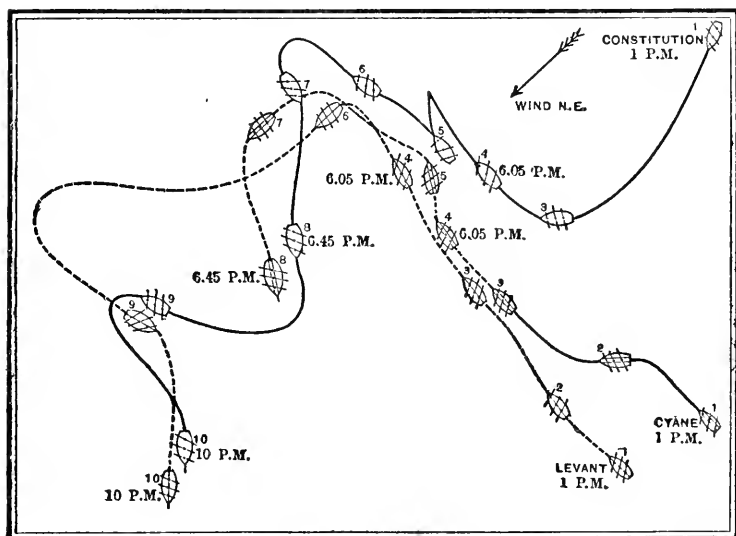


DIAGRAM OF ACTION BETWEEN THE CONSTITUTION AND THE CYANE AND LEVANT, FEB. 20, 1815. LAT.  $33^{\circ} 44'$  N., LONG.  $14^{\circ} 39'$  W.

northward with their starboard tacks on board. The nearest was the British frigate-built ship Cyane, commanded by Captain Gordon Thomas Falcon, and the other, the ship sloop Levant, Captain the Honorable George Douglas. They were proceeding in company from Gibraltar to the West Indies, and both commanders had heard before

leaving port that the Constitution was in the neighborhood. At four o'clock, the Cyane made sail before the wind to join her consort and to enable her commander to consult with Captain Douglas, who was his senior. In the meantime the Constitution was bearing down upon them under studying-sails. At half past four her main royal mast carried away, and she lost some distance while getting up a new mast. She began firing her bow guns at the Cyane about five o'clock, but the shot fell short. Soon afterwards the two British ships were within hail of each other, and they immediately hauled aboard their starboard tacks and endeavored to gain to windward of the Constitution. The object of the two commanders was evidently to delay the action until night, when by manœuvring under cover of darkness they might hope to succeed in crippling their opponent. It is quite doubtful if Captain Douglass would have entered this contest but for two valuable convoys that had sailed from Gibraltar at about the same time his ships got away. He hoped by disabling the Constitution to prevent her from intercepting them. Captain Stewart, on the other hand, had exerted every effort to get in a few blows on the Cyane before she could reach the support of the *Levant*; but his mainmast delayed him. Neither side met with a full measure of success in the preliminary

movements. The British ships failed to outwind the Constitution, and were forced into action within supporting distance of each other just after sunset. About six o'clock they ran up red English ensigns and formed in a line with the wind on the starboard beam, the Levant being two or three ship's-lengths in advance. The Constitution hoisted her colors, and at five minutes past six invited the contest by firing a shot between the two ships. She was at this time only 300 yards on the starboard side of the Cyane and slowly passing her. Broad-sides were exchanged immediately, and for fifteen minutes a very hot action ensued. The sea was covered with a light mist, and the moon came out, while dense masses of smoke formed to leeward of each ship. When it finally cleared away from the Constitution she found herself abreast of the Levant with the Cyane luffing up astern to deliver a raking broadside. Captain Stewart quickly fired a broadside into the Levant; then, hidden in the smoke of his own guns, braced the after sails aback and went astern enough to pour a heavy fire into the Cyane. As her companion wore to come back to her assistance, the Constitution's sails were again filled. She shot ahead and fired two broadsides into the stern of the Levant as she was turning. Captain Falcon, seeing the extremely hazardous position of the latter, gallantly stood in between

the two ships to take this fire, and Captain Douglas immediately drew out of the combat with his braces gone and his ship badly cut up. The Cyane now attempted to go off before the wind, but the Constitution wore short around and gave her a raking fire over the stern. As she luffed up and fired her port broadside, Stewart placed his ship within hail on her port quarter, where he held her practically at his mercy. Finding the case hopeless, Captain Falcon fired a gun to leeward and hoisted a light in token of surrender, just forty minutes after the first broadside had been fired. His ship was hulled a number of times between wind and water, five carronades had broken loose, much of the rigging was gone, the main and mizzen-masts were in danger of falling over the side, and many of his men were disabled.

Lieutenant Hoffman was at once sent on board with a small crew. The officers were removed to the Constitution and the crew left on board under guard of fifteen marines. This transfer occupied nearly an hour, and at seven forty-five Captain Stewart filled away again in pursuit of the Levant. But Captain Douglas did not know that the Cyane had surrendered, and he had no idea of running away from her. He had simply hauled out to reeve new braces and repair damages. At eight o'clock he was discovered standing for the Consti-

tution, and forty minutes later they passed within fifty yards of each other on opposite tacks. They exchanged broadsides, and the Constitution headed around under the stern of the Levant and raked her. Perceiving now that the Cyane had struck, Captain Douglas attempted to run, but it was too late. His wheel had been shot away in the last broadside, and his lower masts had been badly wounded. After a chase of half an hour he surrendered, and Lieutenant Ballard was sent to take possession. Three hours sufficed to put the Constitution in good fighting trim once more and to transfer some of the prisoners.

This battle is noted for the splendid seamanship of the Americans and the gallant behavior of the English. Captain Stewart had succeeded, by running and backing from one ship to the other, in fighting each separately, and in preventing his own ship from being raked. There is nothing finer in our annals. He had the advantage of the weather gauge from the start, and his movements were often obscured by the haze and smoke. A large part of the action was fought by moonlight. The British ships, being smaller and lighter, were much more easily disabled than the Constitution, and their batteries were less formidable. This does not appear to be so if the total weight of broadside is taken as a measure of their power.

The *Cyane* carried twenty-two 32-pound carronades on her gun-deck, and ten 18-pound carronades and two long 12-pounders on her spar-deck, — thirty-four guns in all, firing a broadside of 454 pounds. The battery of the *Levant* was all on one deck: eighteen 32-pound carronades, two long 9-pounders, and one shifting 12-pounder, throwing 309 pounds of metal at one broadside. Thus the total broadside fire of the two ships was 763 pounds, as compared with a nominal weight of 704 pounds on the *Constitution*; but the English guns were less effective at short range, and the sides of their ships were much lighter and more vulnerable than those of their antagonist. It was something akin to a battle between a modern armored ship and two smaller protected cruisers whose guns have to be used at close quarters to do any great amount of damage. Captain Stewart, however, did not take advantage of his long guns, as he probably thought he had a better chance of capturing both ships by coming to close quarters at once. The crew of the *Constitution* numbered 451 men at this time, and she lost 6 killed and 9 wounded. Her antagonists lost 19 killed and 42 wounded, out of a total of 320. The *Cyane* carried 180 men, and her share of the casualties was 38, while the *Levant* had 140 men and lost 23. The disparity on the two sides was therefore very great, both in casualties and damages.





CHARLES STEWART



This was the last great fight of our old ship, as it was the last frigate action of the war. It may be a delicate question of ethics whether Captain Stewart ought to have gone into it or not, knowing that peace had been declared. The Englishmen probably knew it also; but the fighting spirit which made of naval war a series of duels still prevailed, and they would have been condemned as cowards had any of them shown signs of hesitancy. Besides, it was not known that the treaty had been accepted by the two governments.

This battle has left us the usual number of stories, most of which have no greater value than the ordinary newspaper report. One incident is interesting for the glimpse it affords us of the Yankee sailor's peculiarities. When the tub of grog was brought on deck for serving out just before the action began, the men turned it into the scuppers, saying they wanted "no Dutch courage on board." It may be added that they promptly sent a request into the cabin for the customary issue after the action. In connection with this combat, a queer tale is told by Cooper as a warning against committing men to the deep before ascertaining that they are dead. "The light of the moon proved of great service to one poor fellow. In the heat of the combat, a man at one of the forecastle guns fell at the precise moment

when a shot entered near him. He was reported dead, and an order was given to pass the body across the deck, and to throw it overboard. A midshipman and two men were thus employed, but were baffled in endeavoring to pass the shoulders through a port. The midshipman sprang over into the fore-chains to assist, when he saw some muscles of the supposed dead man's face twitching, and he ordered the body drawn back, and passed below to the surgeons. Before the *Levant* struck, the man was back at his gun, fighting as well as the rest of them. He was subject to fits and had fallen in one, but recovered in time to return to his quarters. The story should be told, as a warning against haste in such cases. Thousands are buried alive on shore, and living men are sometimes committed to the deep in the hurry of sea-fights."

Among the anecdotes of this action there is another which relates that a shot killed two men in the waist, passed through a boat in which two tigers were chained and lodged in the head of a spar.

The intercourse between the British and their captors does not appear to have been as pleasant and cordial as upon former occasions. The log of the *Constitution* abounds in such statements as the following: —

“Complaint by prisoners of having lost various articles. Thorough search made for them.”

“Mustered all hands with their bags and made thorough search of all parts of the ship for missing articles; found a few old coats, but nothing of any consequence. Ordered all the prisoners’ baggage put into the empty bread room, locked up and key given to the first lieutenant with orders to let none go into it without an officer of the Constitution being present.”

“The prisoners orderly except some of the British officers of whom this ship’s wardroom officers complained that they did not conduct themselves below like gentlemen, being in their language indecent, vulgar and abusive to each other.”

“Captain Stewart visited the Cyane in company with Captain Falcon who wished to see the wounded men, found them all doing well.”

“Another search among the Constitution’s crew but little found. Found much clothing among the prisoners. It appeared that after the ships had struck their colors that their men broke into the Spirit and Slop rooms and officers’ apartments and pillaged all they could.”

“Landed prisoners. Another quarrel about articles stolen from British prisoners and another search.”

The day after the battle was spent in overhauling and repairing the spars of the two prizes and in getting them ready for their voyage home.

Captain Stewart decided to run down to the Cape Verde Islands in preference to the Madeiras to land his prisoners, probably because there was less likelihood of meeting a British squadron. He arrived at Port Praya on the 10th of March, and an English brig was soon chartered to serve as a cartel. One hundred of the prisoners were put on board to get her ready for sea. Others were landed from the *Levant* during the next day and preparations were made for the transfer of their effects. The work was delayed by a very thick low-lying fog, which was destined to bring the *Constitution* nearer to capture than she had ever been, and likewise to facilitate her escape.

At a few minutes past noon of the 12th, the upper sails of a large ship were discovered above the fog quite close in, and immediately afterwards two other large ships hove in sight, apparently standing for the port. It is said that these sails were first discovered by an English midshipman, who called to his captain to "look at the large ship in the offing." Lieutenant Shubrick, serving as first lieutenant of the *Constitution*, also looked, and at once reported the discovery to Captain Stewart, who was shaving in his cabin. He ordered the anchor up to go outside for a look at the stranger, but when the other sails were reported he sent word to cut the cable and to signal the *Cyane* and

Levant to get under way. He states in his log that he suspected the ships to be part of the enemy's squadron, and deemed it most prudent to put to sea, as the English had hitherto paid little respect to neutral waters, especially of the countries which had no navies. He was doubtless influenced, too, by the decided unfriendliness of the Portuguese governor. Within fifteen minutes after the first alarm, the Constitution was standing out of the harbor under topsails, followed closely by her prizes. The Portuguese batteries opened fire on them, manned, it is said, by the English sailors who had been landed, but no damage was done. Preparations were made for meeting the strange ships, and additional sails were hoisted as rapidly as possible. As they cleared the entrance close under East Point, they headed on the port tack to the eastward along the shore and passed within range of the nearest ship. The strangers, observing that they were trying to get away, tacked and made all sail in chase. Only the sails could be seen above the thick fog, and neither side could quite make out the other. Captain Stewart supposed the new comers to be two British ships of the line and one frigate, and he immediately ordered the first cutter and gig to be cut loose from the stern. The English prisoners soon recognized them to be the squadron of Sir

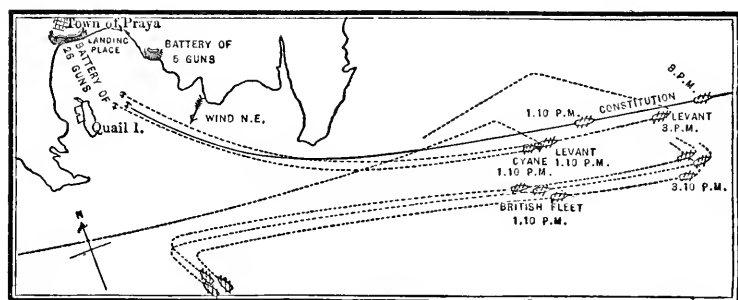
George Ralph Collier, two 50-gun frigates, *Leander* and *Newcastle*, built expressly to outclass the American frigates, and the *Acasta* of 40 guns.

These ships had left the coast of North America in pursuit of the *Constitution* shortly after her escape from Boston. It seems that the *Leander* met the *Newcastle* and *Acasta* in Cape Cod Bay on the 24th of December. Captain Collier got hold of a story that the *Constitution* had gone to sea to meet the President and the Congress. As amusingly stated by an English historian, this story, "whether derived from fishermen, cattle dealers, or any other of the cunning New England folk, was credited by Sir George Collier," and he hurried all three ships to sea in pursuit of the "*Constitution* and the two other heavy frigates." He cruised in the Western Islands, and was fooled again by another cunning Yankee, who pretended to take his ships for the very squadron he was in search of. The conviction that he would find three American frigates together may have affected his eyesight at Port Praya. At any rate it explains his extreme caution and consequent bungling of the chase which followed.

The chase became very exciting, as the two larger vessels held their own on the lee quarter of the *Constitution*, and the *Acasta* was gradually making to windward of her. The *Cyane* was in



great danger. She dropped astern and to leeward so rapidly that a little after one o'clock Stewart signaled her to tack to the northward and westward. He expected this to detach one of the enemy's ships in pursuit, but it did not. They kept steadily on, and the Cyane soon disappeared. The Levant also lost distance, and an hour later she too was ordered to tack. The enemy had crept



ESCAPE OF THE CONSTITUTION FROM BRITISH FLEET AT PORT PRAYA.

up close enough to fire a number of broadsides at the Constitution, the shot falling short, but it was dangerous work. The least mistake or accident meant the loss of the ship. As Stewart says in his log, "It became necessary to separate from the Levant or to risk being brought into action to cover her." "The whole of the enemy's squadron tacked in pursuit of the Levant and gave over the pursuit of this ship." "This sacrifice of the Levant became necessary for the preservation of the Con-

stitution.” The squadron quickly disappeared, to the great grief of the English prisoners, and our frigate was left free to pursue her course for home.

In explanation of the movements of the English ships we must take into consideration Captain Collier’s belief that he had three strong frigates to deal with. The fog effectually hid the guns on both sides. A few minutes’ clear weather would have shown him the true character of his opponents, and the Constitution would probably have ended her days in England. When the Cyane tacked, he did not wish to weaken his fleet against the two remaining ships; and when the Levant also went about he signaled the Acasta, the only ship able to weather the Constitution, to tack in pursuit. This left two ships in chase of one, and one ship in chase of the two which had tacked to the westward. The Leander’s first lieutenant then suggested that if the two ships which had stood away from the fleet were really frigates, they would be more than a match for the Acasta, and Captain Collier thereupon determined to go about with his other two ships. Although subsequent discoveries made the English officers feel very sore over this chase, the judgment of the commanding officer had an element of soundness in it. He expected to find two heavy American frigates in Port Praya, where they would fall an easy prey to his squadron, if kept together. Divided, they were not certain of getting anything.

The Constitution crossed the Atlantic and anchored in Maranham on April 2; then, after one more row over stolen articles, the remaining prisoners were landed. Stewart next hove to off the harbor of San Juan, Porto Rico, to ascertain the condition of national affairs, and received positive information from the governor that the treaty of peace had been ratified. He arrived in New York and anchored abreast of the Battery on the afternoon of May 15, 1815, thus ending another lucky cruise for "Old Ironsides." The fate of her prizes was soon learned. The Cyane reached New York in April. Lieutenant Hoffman's anxiety during his passage of four weeks must have been very great. He lost sight of all the ships within half an hour after tacking in obedience to Captain Stewart's signal. About an hour afterwards, he heard a heavy cannonading which continued for a long time, but as there was nothing to be gained by his going back to the assistance of the Constitution, he shaped his course for the United States.

The Levant, on the other hand, had fared badly. After tacking, she was so close pressed by the British squadron that Lieutenant Ballard put back into Port Praya. The neutrality of the harbor, as Captain Stewart had supposed, afforded no protection whatever. The Newcastle and Acasta opened fire on her, notwithstanding the fact that the flag

was hauled down. Lieutenant Ballard ordered his men to lie down on the deck, and fortunately not one of them was hurt. The shot did some damage in the town, however, and Captain Collier had to pacify the governor. When an English lieutenant came over the side to take possession of the *Levant*, he supposed she was the American sloop *Hornet*, and the only satisfaction poor Ballard got out of the adventure was in disabusing his mind of the error.

The treaty of peace was ratified on February 17, and hostilities were to cease upon ratification, so that Stewart's capture came three days after the war was over. Thirty days were allowed for the cessation of hostilities in the eastern part of the Atlantic, and all prizes taken after that were to be surrendered. The *Cyane* was therefore retained in our service. The principle upon which Captain Stewart had proceeded in continuing offensive operations after he knew that peace was assured seems to have been considered sound at that time. It was followed by the British and Americans alike, although it seems now to have led to a needless loss of life.

It is curious that impressment, the chief grievance of the war, was not mentioned in the treaty. England has never formally given up the right she claimed at that time, but it has never since been



STEWART MEDAL



exercised against the United States, and it seems doubtful if it will ever be attempted again. Our Navy has acquired a very different footing among the nations of the earth, and the removal of sailors from our ships, even by a belligerent, would doubtless be regarded as a cause of war.

The success of the War of 1812 cannot be credited to one frigate, yet the Constitution absorbed the largest amount of attention, as she did by far the greatest damage to British armed ships upon the sea. The guns captured by her amounted to more than half the number taken from all the British ocean cruisers. In all her subsequent cruising, she became an object of interest to the English people, as she had already acquired the respect of British officers. Captain Dacres visited her in Malta fully a generation after his defeat. Lieutenant Chads's visit in China has already been mentioned.

## CHAPTER XII

### CRUISES AND INCIDENTS SUBSEQUENT TO THE WAR OF 1812

THE trouble with Algiers broke out afresh during the war, while we were unable to protect our merchant-shipping in the Mediterranean; but in 1815 we found ourselves in a position to end the whole system of peace tribute, as that with Tunis and Tripoli had been broken up ten years before. Two squadrons were fitted out, one of ten ships at New York under Decatur, who sailed five days after the Constitution arrived home, and the other under Bainbridge from Boston six weeks later. Our old frigate was in need of extensive repairs, and she could not therefore be prepared for sea in time to join either of these squadrons. Her period of enforced idleness lasted about six years, and in 1821 we find her at Boston ready for another cruise. She sailed on May 13, under command of Captain Jacob Jones for service as flagship of the Mediterranean squadron, and made the voyage to Gibraltar in the short time of twenty-one days. The cruise



was uneventful, and she did not even revisit the scene of her old triumph, but made only a few ports between Gibraltar and Smyrna. Port Mahone was the rendezvous where she spent much time. It was during this cruise, in 1822, that Lord Byron paid her a visit. He is said to have remarked while on board that he "would rather have a nod from an American than a snuff-box from an emperor."

In the fall of 1823, the Constitution was back in Boston for a new crew, but did not refit until three years later, when, under the command of Captain Thomas Macdonough, she once more sailed for the Mediterranean station to join the squadron of Commodore John Rodgers. This cruise lasted nearly four years under several commanders. Captain Macdonough kept her only a year, and then turned her over to Captain Daniel T. Patterson, whose command lasted until she returned to the United States. He was relieved, however, for a short interval during the winter of 1825-26 by Elia A. F. Vallette and George C. Read. During this cruise, her duty seems to have been entirely that of a sentry standing guard over American shipping and affording visible evidence of the power behind the flag. One incident is interesting in connection with the Greek Revolution. Provisions had been sent to Dr. Howe for distribution to the starving population. Part of the cargo was stolen by Greek

brigands, and the Constitution was summoned to aid in its recovery. Captain Patterson responded promptly, and succeeded in forcing the captain of the gang to restore everything. The ship left the station in the summer of 1828, and went out of commission at the Boston Navy Yard on July 19.

The period extending from the close of the War of 1812 to the Mexican War was one of comparative monotony for the Navy, although its duties in keeping down the pirates and giving security to foreign trade were very necessary. Many of the old ships were broken up as new ones were added, and by the middle of the century only three of the old vessels remained in the service. Curiously enough, they were the United States, the Constitution, and the Constellation, the first three ships of the Navy to be launched. Several line-of-battle-ships and a few steamers had been built.

Between the years 1828 and 1830, "Old Ironsides" was surveyed and reported unseaworthy. Her frames were generally sound, but the outside planking, the ceiling in the hold, and the decks were badly decayed. The estimated cost of repairs exceeded the total original cost of building, and the Secretary of the Navy decided, upon the recommendation of the Naval Commissioners, to have her broken up or sold. This might have passed without serious opposition had not her proverbial

good luck once more intervened to save her. Oliver Wendell Holmes, who was a student at the Dane Law School and only just past his majority, saw in a newspaper one morning that the Constitution was to be destroyed by order of the Navy Department. He seized a pen and dashed off on a scrap of paper these stanzas : —

“ Ay, tear her tattered ensign down !  
Long has it waved on high,  
And many an eye has danced to see  
That banner in the sky ;  
Beneath it rung the battle shout,  
And burst the cannon’s roar ; —  
The meteor of the ocean air  
Shall sweep the clouds no more.

“ Her deck, once red with heroes’ blood,  
Where knelt the vanquished foe,  
When winds were hurrying o’er the flood,  
And waves were white below,  
No more shall feel the victor’s tread,  
Or know the conquered knee ; —  
The harpies of the shore shall pluck  
The eagle of the sea !

“ Oh better that her shattered hulk  
Should sink beneath the wave ;  
Her thunders shook the mighty deep,  
And there should be her grave ;  
Nail to the mast her holy flag,  
Set every threadbare sail,  
And give her to the god of storms,  
The lightning and the gale ! ”

This poem, with the title "Old Ironsides," was first published in the "Boston Advertiser," and was quickly copied in all the newspapers of the country. It was even printed on handbills and circulated on the streets of Washington. The public sentiment aroused was irresistible. The Navy Department's order was immediately revoked. Congress appropriated the necessary money to rebuild her, practically without alteration of the original model. On June 24, 1833, she was placed in the new dry dock just completed at the Boston Navy Yard, and was the first vessel to enter the dock. Captain Hull once more took command of her and directed the docking in the presence of Vice President Van Buren and a large number of people. This was the first time in her career that a careful examination could be made of the keel. It was found hogged and about two and a half feet out of line, the result in part of sticking fast on the ways when launching, and doubtless also of carrying too heavy a battery. The keel was straightened, and she was thus restored to the lines of Mr. Humphreys's model, having been so completely rebuilt under the superintendence of Josiah Barker that she became virtually a new ship.

No sooner had the restoration been completed than she was plunged once more into a discussion more bitter by far than the first. There had been

no difference of opinion about breaking her up, but there was a pronounced difference of opinion on the propriety of Andrew Jackson as a figurehead. Captain Jesse D. Elliott had been ordered to command the Boston Navy Yard in the spring of 1833, and he arrived in time to witness the reception of Andrew Jackson. Seeing the enthusiasm for the President and the cordiality with which he was met by the Boston people, he conceived the notion of gratifying them by replacing the figurehead of their favorite ship with the head of Jackson. The first figurehead, a statue of Hercules, had been struck by a shot before Tripoli. It was succeeded by a figure of Neptune, and then by a plain billet, which Captain Elliott proposed to remove. He evidently intended to spring this agreeable surprise on the good people of the city, and he quietly requested official approval of the project. The Navy Department readily granted the necessary permission, and the work was committed to Mr. L. S. Beecher, a skillful carver of wood.

The news soon spread, and the previous storm was as nothing compared with the gale that now swept over the good city of Boston. Captain Elliott must have suffered a rude awakening when he found himself threatened with a coat of tar and feathers. The abuse he endured was something

almost beyond imagination. Threats and vituperation circulated freely in newspapers. Handbills and anonymous letters were sent directly to the chief offender. The matter became a political question, and the Whigs were most offensive in their opposition. A more disgraceful exhibition of spleen has seldom occurred in our history. The expediency of putting the figure of a living President upon one of our ships seems doubtful, and the people of Boston had a certain element of right in their objection. Then, too, Jackson had made his name as a soldier, and there did not seem to be any good reason why he should adorn a ship. He did not fit the case. If any living man was to be selected, a naval hero would have been far more appropriate, and the question was asked by many people outside of New England, "Why associate Jackson so intimately with a ship which holds the memories of our old sailors?" He was represented in dress suit, bareheaded, with a large cloak over his shoulders. His right hand was extended holding a roll of manuscript, and his left hand was pushed into the breast of his waistcoat. There was a precedent in the case of the frigate John Adams, which not only carried a statue of Mr. Adams, but was also named for him while he was the chief magistrate. Nevertheless, the precedent was bad, and Captain Elliott, who was a Jacksonian



*Andrew Jackson*



*Billet*

FIGURE-HEADS OF THE CONSTITUTION





Democrat, was probably more or less influenced by party considerations. His biographer writes that he wished to please the people of the West and to increase their interest in the Navy by placing their hero upon the favorite ship of the East. His success was questionable, as he was literally persecuted out of the Navy Yard. A more courteous and reasonable opposition would doubtless have led to the abandonment of the project, as the Naval Commissioners had already given him some latitude in the matter, but he would not yield in the face of threats and abuse. Mr. Beecher was approached by representative citizens who offered a considerable sum for permission to carry the half completed image away, but Captain Elliott at once removed it under guard to the Navy Yard. There were rumors of an attempt to take it away by force, and arms were dealt out to the sailors for the purpose of repelling an invasion. It was finished in the Yard and placed on board the ship in the late spring of 1834. She was moored between two line-of-battle-ships for safety, and a marine guard was stationed in plain view of the bow; but in spite of all precautions the daylight of July 3 disclosed a sadly mutilated figurehead. Captain Elliott immediately reported the fact to the Secretary of the Navy and instituted an investigation, but nothing came of it. While scores of men

belonging to the opposition party in Boston, New York, and Philadelphia knew all about the business, and while the perpetrator was exhibiting the head before various private audiences, the government was powerless. No one came forward with accusation or evidence. Six months or more elapsed before Samuel W. Dewey voluntarily surrendered the head to the Secretary of the Navy. His subsequent immunity from punishment was probably due to influential political connections and to a secret satisfaction, even in Washington, over the insult to Jackson. His father had been at one time in command of Fort Independence, and his uncle was postmaster of New York.

The inception of the outrage, for such it was, dates from a bantering conversation which took place in the counting-house of Henry and William Lincoln. Mr. Dewey, who possessed an adventurous, dare-devil spirit, was captain of one of their ships, and had recently returned from the West Indies. When waiting for a ship he was in the habit of going into his employer's office every day, and one morning Mr. William Lincoln, knowing him to be a harum-scarum fellow, said to him jokingly, without much thought that the matter would ever go any further, "I would give a hundred dollars to see that figurehead cut off." Some weeks passed and the subject was not again alluded

to, when suddenly the whole town was electrified one morning by the news that the figurehead was gone. Mr. Lincoln heard of it on his way to the office, and he found Dewey waiting at the door. The head was in his mother's house on Pearl street, hidden within a large sea-chest.

Dewey had watched his opportunity, and had taken advantage of a thunder-storm on the night of July 2. Provided with a saw, two gimlets and a piece of light rope, he crossed the Charles River in a small boat and pulled in alongside of the Independence. He worked his way around this ship, clinging to her sides until he reached the gangway of the Constitution, where he climbed up one of the man-ropes. It was raining hard, and the night was pitch dark, so that he crept out under the bowsprit and went to work without much risk of discovery. One gimlet was screwed into each side of the head, and the line, passed over the bowsprit, was made fast to both of them. Lying on his back directly under the figure, he was able to use his saw whenever the noise of the thunder and rain filled the ears of the sentry near by. The first cut struck a bolt, and he had to begin a new cut through the chin of the figure; but he finally succeeded in the decapitation and in getting the head down into the boat. Here a new difficulty confronted him, as the boat was nearly full of water

from one of the scuppers of the ship. The passage back to Boston was almost as dangerous as the adventure on the Constitution, but he succeeded in crossing. He carried his trophy, hidden in a coffee-sack, through the streets of the city without meeting a soul.

This whole affair seems to have been treated as a huge joke, and Dewey became a hero among the knowing ones. A club was formed and various gentlemen assembled at a dinner at which the head formed the centrepiece. When the members met in the street they were in the habit of drawing their hands across their chins by way of indicating their enjoyment of Dewey's cut. The head was subsequently carried in triumph to Washington, by way of New York and Philadelphia, and the adventurous captain became the source of much entertainment. His impudence seemed to have had no limit, for he contemplated carrying the President his own head, and was restrained only by Mr. Jackson's illness.

Captain Elliott did not acknowledge defeat in the loss of his figurehead, but quietly provided a canvas cover for the stump and bided his time. The Constitution was fitted for sea during the winter, and she sailed for New York early in March of 1835, with Elliott in command. She did not get out without threats of a combination to man

the guns at the Narrows and stop her if the remains of the figurehead were not removed, but her commander, by way of retaliation, simply had a five-striped flag painted on the canvas as a suggestion of New England's disloyalty. While in New York the figurehead was successfully repaired by Mr. Beecher. It remained on her for more than forty years, and is now at the Naval Academy. The incident of the figurehead was not taken very seriously at the time, and we are hardly justified in drawing a moral from it. Notwithstanding the insult to Jackson, the leaven of federalism was slowly converting the old colonies into one nation, which would probably resent any such disrespect to the President in our day.

As a result of experience during the short voyage from Boston, Commodore Elliott reported that the repairs and straightening of the keel had improved the ship. He wrote, "There is not a more weatherly, finer and faster ship in the service." Nevertheless, she labored so heavily during the voyage to France as to part some of her chain plates and to pitch one of the 24-pounders out through a fore-castle port. The captain's correspondence contains comments on the weakness of the channels and the general lack of stability. He says in one place that there is danger of losing the masts overboard. She sailed from New York for

France on March 16 with orders to bring home Mr. Livingston and his family, and arrived at Havre on April 10. Affairs in France were in an unsettled state, owing to the indemnity question. The French chamber had appropriated money to pay the indemnity, on condition that the United States must first explain certain offensive clauses in the message to Congress. It was thought best to recall the minister, and soon after the Constitution arrived he went on board. She crossed to Plymouth, England, early in May and arrived in New York on June 22.

Captain Elliott was then ordered to hoist his flag as commander-in-chief of the Mediterranean squadron, and he got away on August 19, 1835. The cruise lasted three years and was uneventful. General Cass and his family were carried from Marseilles to Constantinople, and a visit to Malta in the spring of 1836 was made the occasion of many expressions of good will on the part of the English officers. Washington's birthday was celebrated very handsomely by dressing ship and firing a national salute from every one of the fourteen British vessels in the harbor. The Constitution returned the salute. On shore the officers were received most cordially, and the old feeling of animosity seems to have died out entirely. Certainly nothing was left undone to make the Americans feel at home.

Old Ironsides returned during the summer of 1838, arriving in Hampton Roads on August 1, and she went up to Norfolk the next day. The anchor was no sooner down than the men began clamoring for their discharges, as all of them were overtime. Two hundred demanded their release from service at once, and they were promptly put on shore. The cruise proved an unfortunate one for Captain Elliott, as he was arraigned on various charges of severity and harshness in discipline, and on one charge of encumbering the berth-deck of the Constitution with jackasses for the improvement of the breed in the United States. He was found guilty, and was suspended for four years. This may throw some light on his difficulties at the Boston Navy Yard, where no doubt an unfortunate lack of tact contributed largely to the controversy over the figurehead.

The ship was recommissioned at the Norfolk Navy Yard on March 1, 1839, under the command of Captain Daniel Turner. Six weeks later she went to New York, and sailed on May 20 for the South Pacific station as Commodore Alexander Claxton's flagship. Her cruising-ground for two years extended along the west coast of South America. Commodore Claxton died on board on March 7, 1841, and Captain Turner succeeded to the chief command until his ship returned to

Norfolk in the fall of the same year. During this commission the report on her qualities gives us a vivid picture of the wooden frigate at sea. "On her passage around Cape Horn she labored beyond everything I had ever witnessed, and gave me a lively idea of what sailors understand by 'working like a basket.'"

The next cruise was a very short one under Captain Foxhall A. Parker, who commanded her from June 22, 1842, to February 16, 1843. For three months she was flagship of Commodore Charles Stewart, her old commander, on the home squadron, and then she was laid up in Norfolk once more. On March 26, 1844, she went into commission for a special cruise to the China seas under Captain John Percival, and sailed from Hampton Roads for New York on April 17. At the latter place she took on board Mr. Wise for transportation to Rio Janeiro, as minister to Brazil, and departed on her long cruise towards the end of May. It would be interesting to follow her from port to port on this voyage completely around the globe, but there is no special event to distinguish one place from another, and the story would be largely a journal of daily happenings. Captain Percival, her commander, called "Mad Jack" in the Navy, had led an eventful life at sea. As a boy of seventeen before the mast he had been impressed

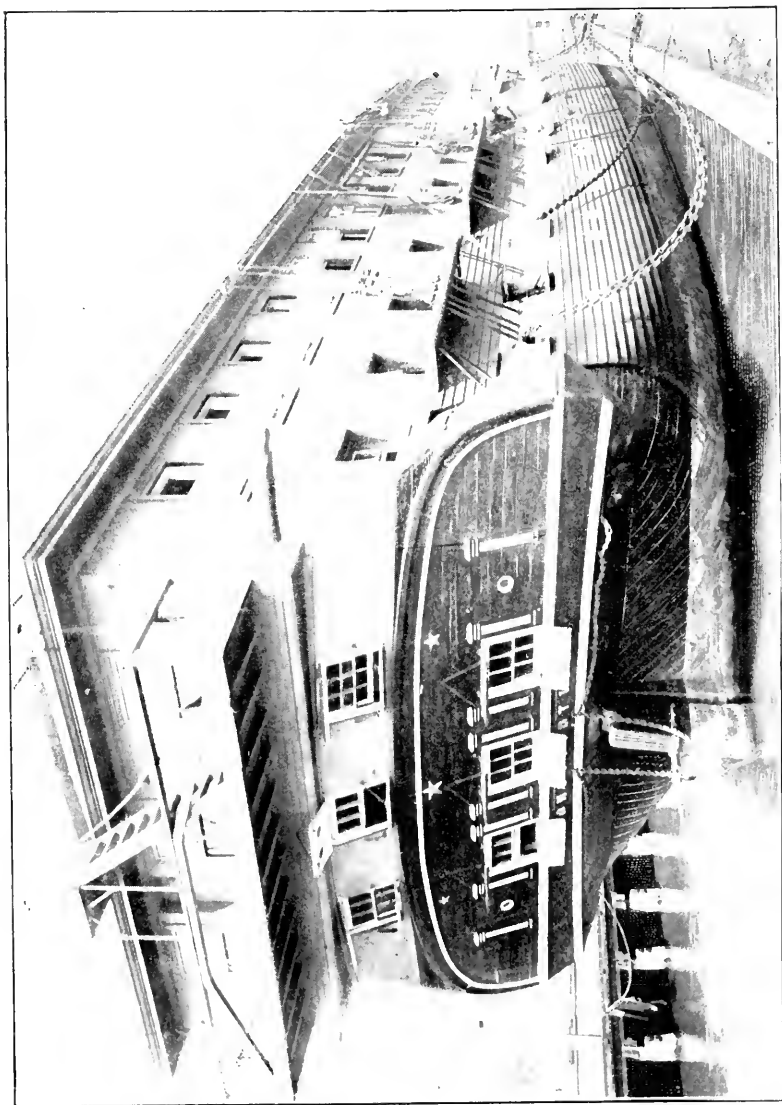


by the English from an American merchant-ship. His intelligence and energy had earned for him promotion in his enforced service, and tradition says that he was captain of the foretop in Nelson's flagship at Trafalgar. The Constitution sailed from Rio Janeiro early in September, passed around the Cape of Good Hope, and made Singapore in February, 1845. There was much sickness on board, and she remained in port between five and six weeks. The British fleet, under command of Commodore Chads, proffered medical services and manifested the most friendly feeling towards the Americans. As related in connection with the Java, the commodore went on board to offer aid and to see the old ship where he had been a prisoner thirty-two years before. During the spring and summer of 1845, the ship proceeded leisurely to Canton River, then to Manila Bay, and late in September to Honolulu. Early in December she sailed for home by way of the Mexican coast and Cape Horn. The voyages from port to port were very long; from Manila to Honolulu, fifty-seven days; Mazatlan to Rio Janeiro, ninety-seven days; and from Rio Janeiro to Boston, sixty-one days. She went out of commission at the Boston Navy Yard on October 5, 1848, after having sailed during the cruise 52,279 miles in 495 days at sea. Captain Percival reported her as a fine ship, but

hard on her cables, and recommended that her fore and mainmasts be placed three fourths of their diameter further aft, also that all ballast be dispensed with.

The stories of two incidents of this cruise have come down to us as pleasant reminders of the spirit and generosity of Jack Tar in the old Navy. On August 13, 1845, at Canton, Captain Percival summoned his men to the quarter-deck and told them the particulars of the suffering and loss caused by the great fire in Pittsburg. Every officer and man in the crew subscribed something towards the relief of the sufferers, and the sum of \$1950 was sent home by a draft on Boston as a token of sympathy. The distance and time were much greater then than now.

During the voyage from Macao to Manila, they sighted a squadron of six ships, and as it was customary to regard all strangers in that part of the world with suspicion, they immediately cleared for action. Soon the wind died out entirely, and one of the ships, a steamer flying the British flag, was seen to approach. A boat was lowered, and some officers came on board with the information that the squadron was that of Sir Thomas Cochrane, and that they had been down to the islands for seven months. They were short of grog, water, and bread, and they wished to beg a week's supply



THE FRIGATE CONSTITUTION AT THE BOSTON NAVY YARD, 1900



from the Constitution. The crew had a lively time securing the guns and hiding the evidences of their extreme readiness to fight. While the provisions were hoisted out the British officers were taken down into the ward-room and feasted. They departed with lightened hearts, drinking the toast, "The good Old Ironsides, always the first to prepare for her friends or foes."

After two years' idleness, she was again commissioned under the command of Captain John Gwynn, and sailed for the Mediterranean squadron in December, 1848, to become the flagship of Commodore W. C. Bolton. Her cruising was principally on the coast of Italy. During the early part of 1849, she carried Consul-General D. S. McCauley and his family from Tripoli to Alexandria. It was during this voyage that a son was born on board to Mrs. McCauley. He received the name Constitution Stewart in honor of the old ship and her former commander.

On September 4 Captain Gwynn died, and was succeeded in command shortly afterwards by Captain Thomas A. Conover. The cruise ended in New York, where the ship went out of commission on January 11, 1851. Two reports on her behavior at sea contain the words, "Excellent, very weatherly, works quick, rolls deep, but easy; stands up well under canvas, but not very dry in

a sea way." "Works within 11 points of the wind; steers, works, sails, scuds and lies to well; rolls deep and easy, and sailing close hauled has beaten everything sailed with."

A new commission dates from December 22, 1852, with Captain John Rudd in command. She sailed in the following March to join the Mediterranean squadron for the last time, as flagship of Commodore Isaac Mayo. Her cruising days were numbered, as already the steam propeller was beginning to make itself felt in the Navy. She carried over Mr. Nicholson as consul to Tunis, and then proceeded to the west coast of Africa to aid in breaking up the slave trade. She was in and out of port incessantly between the Cape Verd Islands and St. Helena for two years, but captured only one vessel, the American schooner H. N. Gambrill. On June 14, 1855, she went out of commission at Portsmouth, N. H., never to be used again in really active service.

In 1860, the Navy Department decided to transfer her to the Naval Academy for the use of the midshipmen, and she was therefore commissioned on the 1st of August under Lieutenant-Commander David D. Porter. He kept her only one month, and then left her safely moored at Annapolis. The outbreak of the Civil War seemed to render her position very unsafe. The frigate United States

had been seized at Norfolk, and there were threats of a combination at Annapolis to destroy the Constitution and other government property. So pronounced was the evidence of hostility on shore that the superintendent of the Naval Academy ordered Lieutenant-Commander George W. Rodgers to move her out into the Roads on the morning of April 21, 1861. The steamer Maryland arrived opportunely from Havre de Grace with a regiment of Massachusetts volunteers under command of Brigadier-General Benjamin F. Butler. Three companies were immediately placed on board to assist in getting her out. All moorings were slipped excepting the starboard bower anchor, and she was taken in tow by the Maryland. Unfortunately she went aground on Greenbury's Point, and the Maryland in backing went hard aground on the opposite side of the channel. The tide was running out rapidly, and about midnight word came that the channel outside would probably be obstructed during the night. This led to a determined effort to pull the Constitution off by means of kedging. With the first run of the kedge she reached deep water and, while bearing on the second kedge, a heavy squall drove her into the mud again. The appearance of several vessels in the offing hurried the crew to their quarters with preparations to repel an attack, but the strangers turned out to

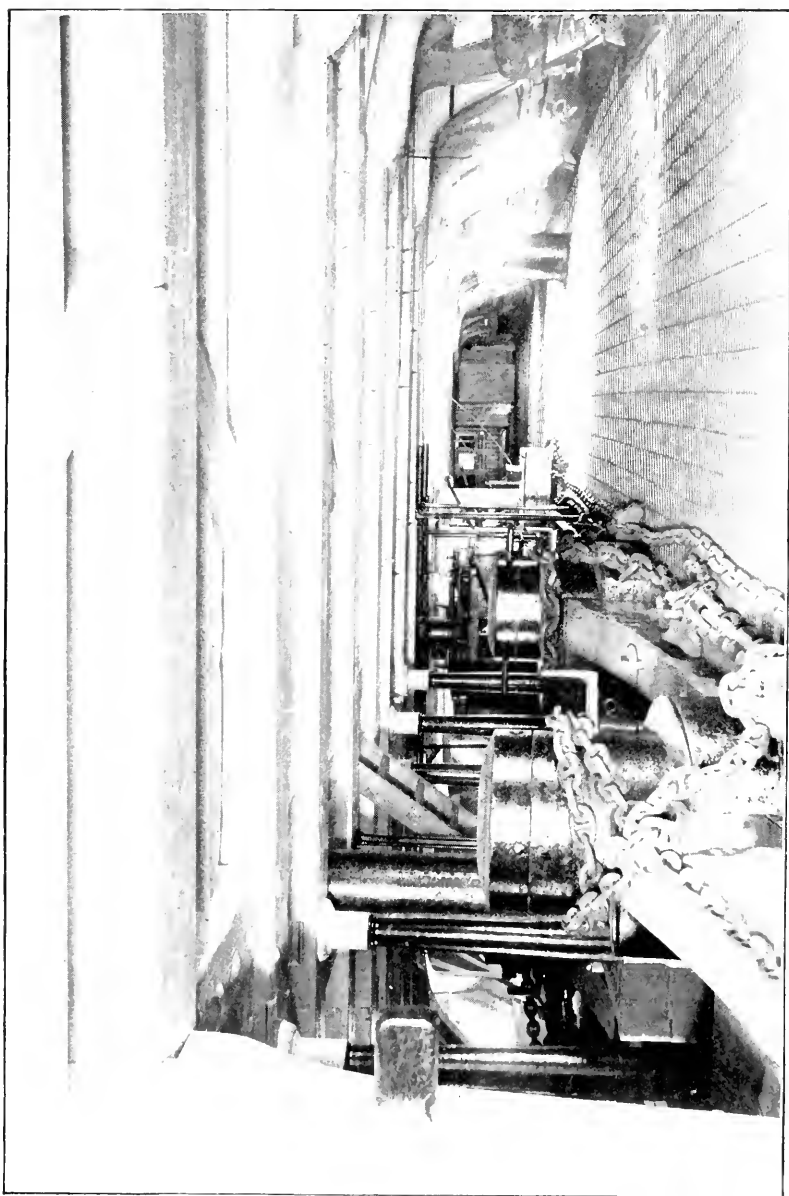
be the steamer *Boston* with New York troops, and a tug from Havre de Grace. The *Constitution* was soon towed out into deep water. On the 26th, she left her anchorage in tow of the *R. R. Cuyler*, with the steamer *Harriet Lane* in company, and three days later was safe at the New York Navy Yard. The Naval Academy was moved to Newport soon after, and she was taken there for service as a training and practice ship.

In August, 1865, she was towed out of Newport for Annapolis, under command of Lieutenant-Commander P. C. Johnson, but she soon ran away from her tug and made the voyage under sail alone. She exhibited a liveliness equal to anything in her palmiest days, and left a record for a few hours of thirteen and a half knots.

From this time until 1871, her commanding officers were placed on board mainly as care-takers. Lieutenant-Commander (now Admiral) George Dewey had her from November 5, 1867, to August 1, 1870.

Her period of usefulness had practically passed away at the time of her last cruise, and the progress in the art of ship-building during the Civil War converted her into an antiquity ; endeared to the American people, to be sure, but still a relic of the past. In 1871 she was taken to the Philadelphia Navy Yard too far gone to be trusted





GUN-DECK OF THE FRIGATE CONSTITUTION, 1900



under sail at sea. ' Another crisis like that of 1828 had overtaken her. She lay in ordinary for a short time, until it was finally decided to rebuild her by replacing all decayed timbers and planking. At one time there was a suggestion of putting machinery into her, but fortunately the plan was given up. Of no service as a steamer, she would have been ruined as a memorial of the old sailing navy. While the work of rebuilding was in progress, the Navy Yard was moved from Philadelphia to League Island, and the contract to complete her was given to Wood, Dialogue and Company. The effort to have her fitted up as an interesting feature of the Centennial Exhibition failed, and she was not ready until early in 1877. Steam-heating apparatus was placed on board, and care was taken to give her modern appliances, so far as possible.

She was placed in commission at League Island in July, 1877. The command fell to four captains in rapid succession before she left the Navy Yard, and she was not employed until an act of Congress authorized the President to supply public transportation for goods sent by our citizens to the Universal Exposition at Paris in 1878. Captain O. C. Badger took command of her in January of that year, and a number of changes were made at once to stow as much freight as possible in the

hold. She took the cargo on board at the foot of Walnut Street, Philadelphia, and sailed from Delaware Breakwater on March 4.

The passage across proved to be an anxious one, as the repairs did not turn out well, and the working of her timbers under sail developed a number of leaks. She reached Havre early in April and lay there nine months waiting to carry back her cargo. Two incidents occurred on the return voyage to render it memorable as an unhappy one. She sailed from Havre by daylight on January 16, and ran aground off Ballard's Point near Swanage in the middle of the following night. It is reported that an unknown current set her on the English coast, which was supposed to be twenty-seven miles away when she struck. Every effort was made to get her off, and the united pull of five tugs finally succeeded in moving her into deep water. The officers of the British navy were most friendly in the emergency, even sending a battle-ship to assist. She was docked at the Navy Yard, Portsmouth, and soon repaired, as the damage proved to be slight. Captain Badger got to sea once more on January 30, but fourteen days later the rudder head was twisted off in a gale of wind. There was nothing to do but run before it, and she was headed for Lisbon, which she reached in five days. Again she had to go into a government dock, this time

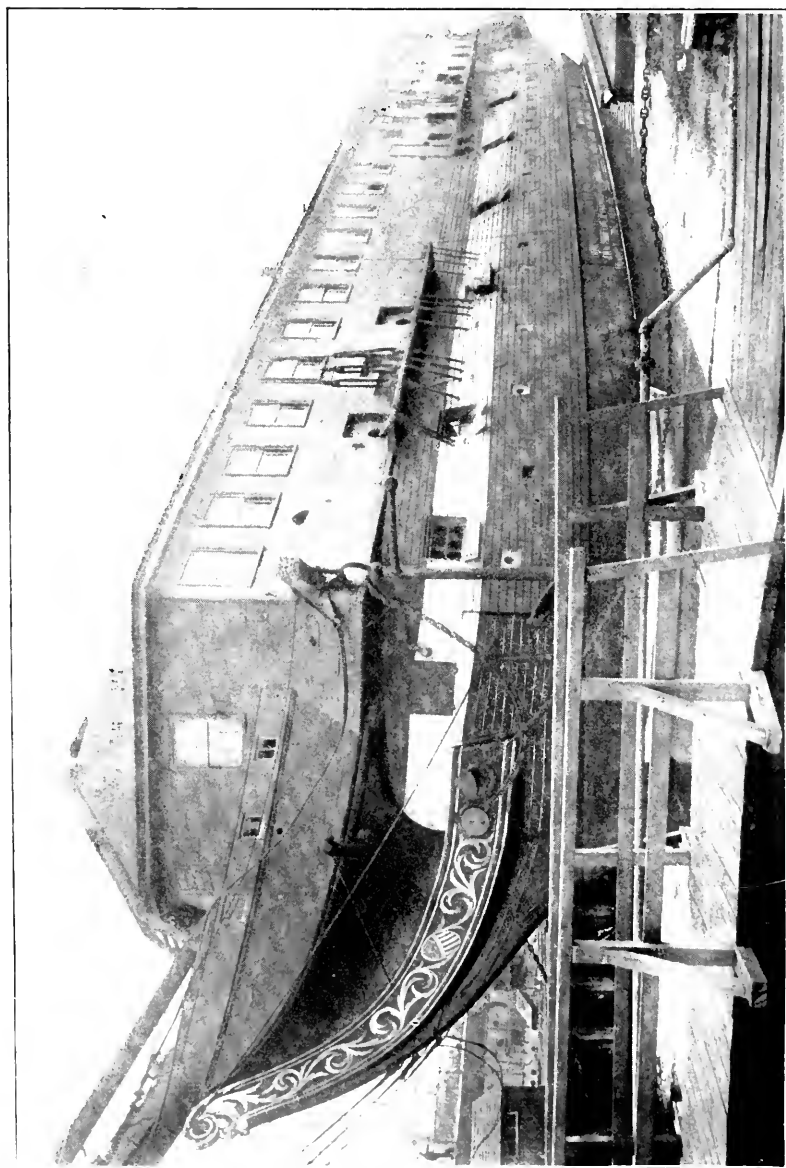
for a much longer period. On April 11, she sailed for home, and arrived in New York on May 24.

The Navy Department now ordered her into service as a training ship for apprentice boys. After a voyage to Philadelphia and return the command was turned over to Captain F. H. Baker, who kept her only a few weeks. Captain O. F. Stanton took command in October, 1879, and during the next two years cruised from the West Indies as far north as Halifax. She was taken south during the winter and north during the summer season for the purpose of working the ship under sail as much as possible. In June, 1881, Captain Stanton surrendered the command to Commander E. U. Shepard, and six months later the ship went out of commission at the New York Navy Yard. This closed her long career at sea. She lay at New York for two years, and was then towed to Portsmouth, N. H., for use as a receiving ship.

When the hundredth anniversary of her launch approached, the Secretary of the Navy ordered her back to her birthplace, and she arrived at the Boston Navy Yard on September 21, 1897, in tow of the tug Leyden, with Commander S. W. Very and a crew of forty-five men on board. The North Atlantic Fleet, consisting of the New York, Brooklyn, Iowa, Massachusetts, and Texas, anchored in the harbor to assist in the celebration. There were

speeches in the Old South Meeting-House by the Governor of Massachusetts, the Mayor of Boston, the Assistant Secretary of the Navy, and the junior Senator from the State, on October 21. The sailors and marines were subsequently reviewed in the Navy Yard, and Old Ironsides formed the central figure of a great reception in her honor.

The old craft now lies housed over and tenantless, except for the crowd of memories which people her decks. She has reached another stage in her existence demanding the assistance of every lover of his country to secure for her a long lease of life. By an act of Congress approved February 14, 1900, the Secretary of the Navy is authorized to restore her to the same condition as regards her hull and rigging as she was when in active service; provided that a sufficient sum of money to complete the work shall be raised through the agency of the Massachusetts State Society of the United States Daughters of 1812. The amount required is estimated at 400,000 dollars, and the patriotic women having the business in charge will no doubt realize their hopes of seeing the old ship completely restored in course of a few years.



THE FRIGATE CONSTITUTION AT THE BOSTON NAVY YARD, 1900





## CHAPTER XIII

### WHAT WE OWE TO THE CONSTITUTION

IT remains now to state more fully what our old frigate stands for in the long list of events which have shaped the character of the American republic. So far as mere materials can be the legitimate object of man's gratitude, she has certainly earned a lasting place in our affections. Her hull represents the homely toil of our ancestors, who had none of the aids of modern science in laying out and constructing their ships. The axe alone served, as it had served in making their homes in the wilderness. Yet nothing better was ever constructed, when we take into consideration the conditions of naval warfare at the time. Only one other ship holds an equal place in our interest and means as much in the consolidation of our Union — the old Monitor. The two ships have certain points of resemblance and of difference. Both were departures in type from what had gone before, and both wrought changes in the construction of war-vessels for the navies of Europe. One floats to-day as the

most beautiful survivor of the old sailing period, and the other lies at the bottom of the sea but the crude beginning of the modern battle-ship. Both gained their victories over people of the same race and blood and the same maritime traditions. The Constitution went out from Boston in the face of tremendous odds, and the Monitor left New York as a forlorn hope. It is a strange coincidence that both should have sailed just before a change of orders could reach them. The most important effect of victory for both ships was a moral one ; in the first case, putting heart into the whole nation by inspiring them with the sense of union, and in the second, infusing courage and hope into the North, which was fighting for the Union. Washington took a deep interest in the construction of the Constitution, and he frequently inspected her sister ship at Philadelphia. Lincoln's favor secured a trial for the Monitor. One is almost tempted to see the work of Providence in this strange parallel. The Victory, Nelson's flagship at Trafalgar, is well preserved, but she cannot express as much to England as the Constitution to us. The latter was the single champion of a young and struggling nation, and the former the leader of a powerful fleet in the crowning exploit of an old nation's long predominance upon the sea.

The first important service of the Constitution

has been found in the blockade of Tripoli. As the flagship of a squadron which dealt a decisive blow at the system of piracy and tribute that had flourished for centuries, she deserves the gratitude of humanity. We have learned under what discouraging circumstances Edward Preble carried her through that most difficult service. But we can never estimate at too high a value the education received upon her decks by the sailors who afterwards did most to promote the healthy growth of the Navy, and whose cool judgment and courage brought us to the successful ending of the second war with Great Britain.

It is in this war that we have found the Constitution's great victories, and what was equally important to us, her marvelous escapes. Three times she was victorious over British ships, and three times she escaped capture by British squadrons. Nothing finer is to be found in our Navy. The War of 1812 terminated the period of our dependence upon England. For a generation we had been simply a football between England and France, both holding us in scarcely veiled contempt, and our parties at home were lined up according to their sympathies with one nation or the other. There was an English party and a French party. We had gained our independence, but not our faith in the Republic of the United States.

The country was still colonial, with the self-interest of localities too strongly marked for the development of a strong national sentiment. Our standing abroad was low during this formative period, and we were practically petitioners to Europe.

The character of a nation, like that of an individual, grows imperceptibly for long stretches, modified occasionally by some event that seems to work sudden and great changes. Yet it is seldom the event which forms character, but rather its revelation of the possibilities within. So twenty-three years had passed in party strife which was gradually moulding the constitution into an instrument capable of governing a large population. Slowly, amid numberless humiliations and trials, the common people of this country had been acquiring confidence in their union without knowing it. They were confused by the discussions of politicians and the clamoring of men with selfish interests. Some event, or blow, was needed to show them that they stood shoulder to shoulder against the outside. Such an event was supplied by the Constitution when she anchored in Boston harbor with news of the victory over the *Guerrière*. Reference has already been made to the joy with which she was hailed. The victory served the double purpose of bringing to the surface the real feeling of the New England people and of indicating our best

weapon in a war with Great Britain. There was no longer any talk of hauling up the frigates to keep them out of the clutches of the British. Even the Boston "Centinel," which had condemned the war unsparingly, heartily rejoiced in the achievements "which placed our gallant officers and hardy tars on the very pinnacle of the high hill of honor, and which established the necessity and utility of our navy."

"This usefulness and honor must thunder in the ears of navy haters in high places. Give us a navy." This triumph gave a tone and character to more than the war. It gave a tone and character to the nation for all time. The "Centinel" said truly that a navy was necessary, for it was the Navy which obtained the only success that counted in the negotiations for the treaty of peace. The Constitution formed the most striking figure to this end. Of all the ships first authorized by Congress, she alone was in active commission at the close of the war. The President and Chesapeake had been captured. The Congress was dismantled, and the United States and Constellation were tightly shut in by the British blockade. The war was attended by failure on land. There was not a single campaign upon which we can look back with satisfaction, excepting that of Jackson, and that came too late. The whole management of the War Depart-

ment was but too bitter a confirmation of Washington's disbelief in the efficiency of militia. Our only cause for pride was in the success of a small navy which had come off well in a number of hard-fought battles and had wrought great destruction to British commerce. Although the treaty of peace left us very much where we were before the war, it gave us standing before the world, and it secured for us complete freedom on the high seas. Impressment ceased from that time, and no nation has since attempted to control the commerce of the world by force. Such a consummation means much to the interests of peace and tranquillity among nations. In 1812 England was at the summit of her sea power. It was not an empty boast when her poet wrote : —

“The winds and seas are Britain's wide domain,  
And not a sail without permission spreads.”

A thousand sail manned by 150,000 officers and men stood ready to make this good. No nation could, by the nature of things, maintain such preponderance, and we may well ponder over the fate of the world with one nation in undisputed control of the ocean highways. The United States offered then, and still offers, a sure guarantee against that domination, and Old Ironsides stood both as a warning and as a hope. Her first victory broke

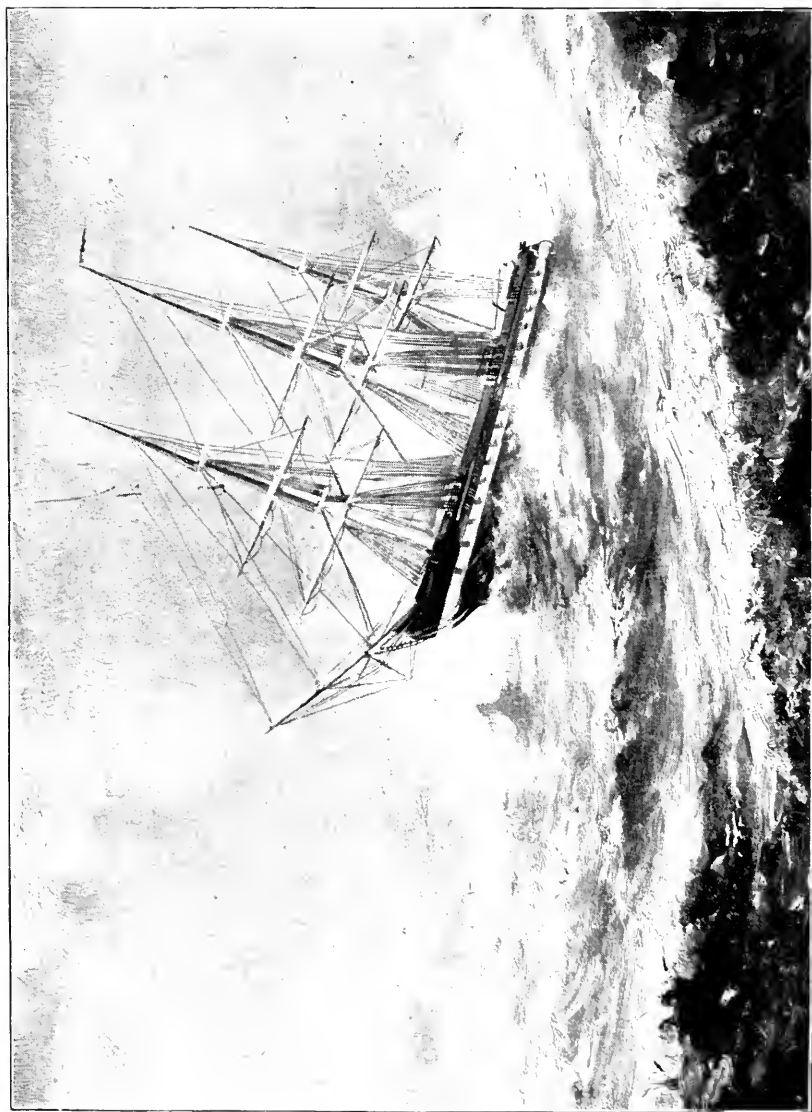
the illusion of invincibility which had begun to surround the British navy, and her second pulled the scales off the eyes of Europe. The English people did not recover their cheerfulness during the three years of the war, and when peace was declared they were still longing for some overwhelming victory to wipe out their sense of shame. For nearly two centuries they had been all powerful. No European navy could make any head against them. When they wanted a French or a Spanish ship they simply went and took her, without much thought of discrepancy in crews or guns. Lord Dundonald tells the story of his first command, a small, badly constructed brig, armed with fourteen 4-pounders. Although his crew numbered only fifty-four men, he boarded and captured in broad daylight a Spanish frigate carrying three hundred and nineteen men and thirty-two fair-sized guns.

The superiority of our ships did not assuage the bitterness of defeat, and in spite of labored plans to show that we had every advantage and could not help winning, the lesson was valuable. There have never been any doubts of the courage and skill of the American sailors and their ability to take care of themselves since the British experiments of 1812. We fought for our freedom upon the ocean as we had fought for our independence upon the land a generation before, and it was fit-

ting that the victory which gained us that freedom should be upon sea. Another fruit of the war was emancipation from European dictation. We established our right to remain neutral when we saw fit. In these later days we can pardon the fierce exultation of our ancestors over the Constitution's victories, even though we cannot feel proud of their behavior. The newspapers were filled with violent, untruthful articles against the British, and our historians were scarcely better. Until all of the actors in the war had passed away, it was as difficult to obtain a fair statement on either side of the water, as it is to-day to obtain both sides of the war of the Rebellion.

Nevertheless, to profit by the lessons of victory, we must not lose sight of its true fruit in vain-glorious boasting over physical prowess. Many elements go toward success in war. The commonest of these is courage. There is hardly a people on the face of the globe that will not, with proper training and superior equipment, supply good soldiers and sailors. Certainly, in the War of 1812 there was no reason to expect any difference in the valor of the two contestants, and there was none. The English fought as bravely and as fairly as the Americans. The blood shed upon the decks of their captured frigates is proof of a dogged resistance which we must admire. As gallant old





THE CONSTITUTION IN A GALE OFF TRISTAN D'ACUNHA



Admiral Chads said in 1845, "It was Greek meet Greek, for we were of the same blood after all." The Americans put better ships under their men and trained them to their duties more carefully, for they had more at stake. The case is stated without bias by the French Admiral, Jurien de la Gravière, in his "*Guerres Maritimes*," from which the following quotation has been taken: "When the American Congress declared war on England in 1812, it seemed as if this unequal conflict would crush her navy in the act of being born; instead it but fertilized the germ. It is only since that epoch that the United States has taken rank among the maritime powers. Some combats of frigates, corvettes, and brigs, insignificant without doubt as regards material results, sufficed to break the charms which protected the standard of St. George, and taught Europe what she should have already learned from some of our combats, if the louder noise of our defeats had not drowned the glory, that the only invincibles upon the sea are good seamen and good artillerists. This war should be studied with unceasing diligence; the pride of two peoples to whom naval affairs are too generally familiar has cleared all the details and laid bare all the episodes, and through the sneers which the victors should have spared, merely out of care for their own glory, at every step can be

seen with more truth that there is only success for those who know how to prepare it." "The Americans showed in the War of 1812 a great deal of skill and resolution. But if, as they have asserted, the chances had always been perfectly equal between them and their adversaries, if they had only owed their triumphs to the intrepidity of Hull, Decatur and Bainbridge, there would be for us but little interest in recalling the struggle. We need not seek lessons in courage outside of our own history. On the contrary, what is to be well considered is that the ships of the United States constantly fought with the chances in their favor, and it is on this that the American government should found its true title to glory." "Nor was the skill of their gunners the only cause to which the Americans owed their success. Their ships were faster; the crews composed of chosen men manœuvred with unanimity and precision; their captains had that practical knowledge which is only to be acquired by long experience of the sea; and it is not to be wondered at that the Constitution, when chased during three days by a squadron of five English frigates, succeeded in escaping by surpassing them in manœuvring and by availing herself of every ingenious resource and skillful expedient that maritime science could suggest."

If to the above it be added that the American

ships were employed against an enormous navy intoxicated with success and careless of preparation against its puny antagonist, we have the whole story of the maritime war of 1812 and the Constitution's claim to greatness.

The period of the old frigate's triumphs is thus confined to twelve years, and we find her pursuing the ordinary duties of peace during the long life which followed. She took no part in the war with Mexico. She carried our flag with dignity and honor until our navy was made up of steamers. Her last cruise as a fighting-ship in the inglorious task of suppressing the slave trade connects her in a way with the Rebellion, whose success would have rendered her services vain. In these days, when machinery is fast replacing sails and man has become independent of wind and tide, our country can well afford to preserve the old ship as the home of departed glory.



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